



From the Realm of Morpheus

A FICTION BY
Steven Millhauser

FROM
THE
REALM
OF
MORPHEUS



Steven Millhauser

William Morrow and Company, Inc.
New York

OceanofPDF.com

Copyright © 1986 by Steven Millhauser

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Publisher. Inquiries should be addressed to Permissions Department, William Morrow and Company, Inc., 105 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Millhauser, Steven.

From the Realm of Morpheus.

I. Title.

PS3563.I422F76 1986 813'.54 86-5395

ISBN 0-688-065101-5

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

BOOK DESIGN BY BETH TONDREAU

OceanofPDF.com

To the memory of my father

MILTON MILLHAUSER

OceanofPDF.com

Contents

PART ONE

I. The Descent

1. *A Game of Baseball*
2. *Sun and Shade*
3. *Shade*
4. *The Stone Chamber*
5. *The Dark Flower*
6. *The Moving Light*
7. *The Woman on the Shore*
8. *The Three Doors*
9. *The Hall of Shadows*
10. *The Black Velvet Curtains*
11. *A Meeting*
12. *Waiting*

II. The Tale of Ignotus

1. *Portrait of a Young Man*
2. *Birth and Flight*
3. *Ignotus*
4. *Julia*
5. *A Carriage and a Garden*
6. *A Fateful Encounter*
7. *Mistress and Bride*
8. *The Great Stromboli*
9. *The Last Performance*
10. *St Ursula*
11. *Felix Brendel*

III. The Library of Morpheus

IV. The Tale of Morpheus and Volumnia

1. *The Moral Maid*
2. *Volumnia Bathing*
3. *Volumnia and Olympia*
4. *Volumnia and the Humble-Bee*
5. *Marriage in the Morphean Mode*
6. *Scurlock*
7. *Virtue Rewarded*

V. Mirror Tales

1. *The Glittering Chambers*

PART TWO

VI. The Tale of Heklo and Ekli

1. *Heklo*
2. *Brother and Sister*
3. *Friendship*
4. *Developments*
5. *A Word of Warning*
6. *Confusion's End*

VII. The Tale of Morpheus and Vivayne

1. *Illore*
2. *The Solitary Maid*
3. *A Demon in the Dark*

VIII. The Tale of the City in the Sea

1. *A Second Jonah*
2. *Going Under*
3. *Beneath the Watery Floor*
4. *The Palace*
5. *Palace Arts*
6. *The Smaller Kingdom*
7. *Court Fashions*
8. *Traveling by Cart*
9. *In the Grove*
10. *Above the Sky*
11. *In Which We Reach Land,
and Make a Surprising Discovery*

IX. The Tale of a Voyage to the Moon

1. *Of the Two Moons*
2. *Arrival*
3. *The White Rock*
4. *The Adventure Continued*
5. *Through the Fissure*
6. *Shouts*
7. *Misunderstandings*
8. *The Waterfall*
9. *Cities of the Moon*
10. *A Pair of Slippers*

X. Envoi: Hymn to Morpheus

PART ONE



OceanofPDF.com

I. The Descent



1. *A Game of Baseball*

ONE fine day toward the middle of August, in the year 19__ in the city of B_____, I was seated at two o'clock in the afternoon on a wooden bench in a public park, watching a baseball game through half-closed eyes.

Is there not something paradoxical about sunshine? The very brightness creates an intensity of shadow that troubles and allures. It's as if the purpose of sunlight were nothing but the revelation of those shadows, which perhaps have always lain hidden there, unseen in the imperfect light of sunless afternoons. You know those insubstantial, spiritual afternoons, when objects cast no shadow, and so do not exist. But sunlight creates the very shadow that rejects it. Thus the sun, proud image of man's reason, does not so much dispel the dark, as give a shape to darkness. Such was the nature of my reflections as I sat on a wooden bench that August afternoon, watching a baseball game through half-closed eyes.

Beside me lay a thick book, a brown paper lunchbag, and a blue nylon jacket with one arm dangling. Before me rose the tall wire backstop, shaped like a triptych. The high sun threw a narrow shadow of elongated diamonds across the catcher's back, over the orange dirt, and beyond the edge of the backstop onto the grass. On the sunny grass a girl in cutoff jeans and a pink halter sat on a white towel, hugging her raised knees. In the striped shadow of the slatted bench a rustcolored dog lay in the dust with its head in its paws. Its hind legs extended out of shadow into sunlight, dividing them into rustbrown and redgold.

A batter stepped briskly forward, suddenly stopped and bent over. He stood up, rubbing his hands with dirt, gripping the yellow bat between his green-stained knees.

On a nearby bench sat a fat bald man wearing Bermuda shorts, a blue baseball cap, and a white T-shirt that showed rain falling from a dark thundercloud. Between two benchslats a green Coke bottle lay shining in the sun.

I have often wondered whether it is possible for words to summon a scene in all its innocence, its freedom from pertinence, its lucid and

precise irrelevance. One labors to be haphazard, yet fatality comes coldly creeping in. For say that a certain event takes place, one fine day. Say, further, that it is an event of momentous consequence, though perhaps slight in itself. Then the innocent details of that day begin to quiver in the memory as if they were about to burst into prophecy; each blade of grass seems to be holding its breath; the diamond-shaped shadows, the girl on the grass, the fat man on the bench freeze into a porcelain permanence, as if without them nothing at all could have come to pass, that dazzling August afternoon; and the lazy red dog seems only to be waiting for the signal to lift its head, seems indeed already to be standing in the sunny and shady wood, slowly wagging its heavy brushlike tail. Or, conversely, the mere listing of details, meaningless in themselves, at once provides them with a significance which one denies in vain. The beauty of irrelevance fades away, accident darkens into design; and like a subtle disease in the veins of the day, Fate spreads its infection everywhere.

The batter tapped the plate. Over the sunny trees two apartment buildings, one dark brown and one darker brown, stuck up like bars of chocolate. On a blue bench under a tree a green-shadowed woman sat beside a sun-dappled baby carriage. The second baseman punched his glove and cried, "No batter, no batter, easy out," somewhere a carhorn sounded, far away came soft shouts of children at play: and soft sounds of passing traffic came, like low waves breaking, scraping back slowly along the beach.

Through the diamond-shaped wire spaces the batter swung slowly, dreamily, like a boy underwater, and again he swung slowly, dreamily, like a boy underwater, then held his bat motionless as a stillness came over things: the batter stared out at the pitcher, who stood beyond the edge of the backstop leaning forward motionless on the mound with his gloved hand bent up behind him and his bare hand dangling at his knees, while behind the pitcher the second baseman stood motionless with his hands on his hips, and behind the second baseman the center fielder stood bent over with his hands on his knees, and behind the center fielder, among the distant dark-green trees, a little man in a red bathing suit sat leaning on his elbow at a little brown picnic table, and over the treetops, in the hazy-blue sky, a pale and perfectly round moon was visible, as if the afternoon had stretched out its legs, closed its eyes, and slowly fallen asleep, and in the warmth and stillness lay dreaming of the cool, thirst-quenching night.

Here and there on the peeling benchwood lay the brown, winged fruits of a maple.

Suddenly the dog lifted its head. The center fielder stood erect, the second baseman looked in the air, the catcher sprang up and tore off

his mask and looked up over his shoulder, the girl turned her head and shaded her eyes, the fat man's neck began to crease with turning, the batter knocked dirt from his cleated shoe. With loud ripping sounds the ball landed in the thicket behind me.

The girl turned away and lowered her hand. The catcher pulled down his mask, the fat man's neck became smooth, the pitcher, standing motionless, lazily held out his gloved hand to receive the ball that was about to enter the leather web . . .

I stretched out my arms and let them fall drowsily to my sides. Bending forward at first, as if I were searching for something in the grass, slowly I stood up in the sun. All at once my mouth began to open wider and wider. I squeezed my eyes shut, I felt myself stretching, stretching . . . But has anyone described these dangerous stretches? For it was as if, endowed with independent life, my arms were straining to break loose from my body, which pulled fiercely the other way, while my mouth strove to devour my entire face, to turn it completely inside out like a pocket. And is there not something instructive in this hunger of the body to be free of itself, to rid itself of itself as of an oppression? And are they not mistaken who consider the yawn to be a sign of bodily fatigue? Rather it is a denial of the body, it is a pure expression of the spiritual. Yawning is yearning. This was the general tenor of my thoughts as I stood there squeezing my eyes shut and stretching, stretching . . . All at once my mouth closed, my arms fell, I blinked sleepily in the bright light. For a while I stood motionless. Then abruptly, as if decisively, I turned and strode around the edge of the bench toward the thicket.

2. Sun and Shade

As I stepped into sudden leafshade at the border of the trees the skin of my neck prickled in the cool dark green and raising a hand I wiped from my hairline the cool sweaty damp.

The vague trees sharpened to knobby brown trunks, dark prickly oak-leaves shaped like little men stretching out their arms, a torn fern, a smooth pearly-gray beechtrunk in which was carved the word RONNY, an uncrushed bronze-and-silver beer can. The ball was sitting a few feet away behind a thick root. As I bent over I saw that it was a broad mushroom with a whitish rubbery cap. I kicked a foot through brown leaves and looked about. Sunlight and leafshade moved on my arms and hands. Sounds of traffic came from an unseen road. Something moved behind me and when I turned I saw the rusty dog standing in the leaves with the ball in its mouth. Bits of sunlight fell sun-red on its shade-brown head.

"Here boy," I said, holding out a hand palm-upward and stepping toward him. The dog sprang sideways and stopped, slowly wagging its heavy brushlike tail. In the dark frame of two tree trunks I saw the uneven green shade, the bright grass, the sunny benchback, the silver backstop, the bright-green playing held. "Here boy, come on fella," I coaxed, snapping my fingers gently. The dog blinked and waited, then sprang past me into the trees.

I half-turned to follow him, irritably shrugged a shoulder, and placed my hands in my pockets. I was standing at the inner edge of the thicket, now gazing in at the trees, now frowning out at the sunny day. Beyond the uneven fringe of dark-green shade I saw the light-green grass and the sunny empty bench on which lay my jacket, my lunchbag, and my book. One jacket arm hung down listlessly. A dark patch of wetness stained the back of the catcher's uniform. The shoulders of the girl were flaming pink. The back of the bald man's fat neck glistened. I raised an arm to my forehead and drew the forearm and the back of my hand slowly across my eyes. When I lowered my hand I saw the dog staring up beside me, its mouth open and its long pink tongue hanging out.

"Now what have you done with it, eh fella?" I stepped toward the dog, who stiffened with expectation. I took another step and the dog leaped away, then stopped: leaped away, then stopped. "What's this? You want to play, is that it?" And I followed the dog into the trees.

Unobserved, the bench behind me trembled, broke apart, and dissolved. The girl on the grass, the fat man on the bench, the backstop, the green playing field wavered, shimmered, and melted away. The sky, the moon, all disappeared silently, leaving no trace of what had once been there.

3. Shade

The thicket was not very deep. The ground began to slope up sharply and here and there great rockslabs, creviced and fissured, rose above me like miniature cliffs. Bushes and trees grew on the dirtpatched ledges of sunny and shady rock and on top of one gray boulder the bare roots of an oak were spread out like a claw. Above the rockslabs a long rusty wire fence was half hidden by trees. Bent and sagging, it bulged forward with the weight of pressing branches, as if it were holding back the forest above it. Through the decaying meshes poked roots and bushes, beyond the fence a darkness of trees rose up, and through the uppermost leaves came flashes of black, flashes of red: passing cars moving lazily along a road of the park.

I lowered my eyes. The dog had vanished. I was standing beside a

shaded rockslab that seemed composed of squarish chunks with many narrow ledges, as if blocks of rock had been fitted carelessly one above the other. In the dirt of the ledges grew clumps of grass and tiny treelets with enormous leaves. On one ledge lay bits of green smashed glass. Beside a grassclump the circular white lid of an icecream cup lay aslant upon its downturned knob. A narrow vertical crack split the rockface and thick bushes grew from within the dark space of the rock. Overhead the blue sky showed in pieces through the trees, but no sunlight fell to break the shade, and when I glanced over my shoulder I could see only a thick tangle of leaves and branches.

Nearby I heard the sounds of passing traffic. Far away came soft sounds of children at play. And soft sounds of passing traffic came, like low waves breaking, scraping back slowly along the beach.

Lazily I raised myself onto a shady rockledge, and as I leaned back I heard the crack of a bat and a great shout beyond the trees: and as the shout subsided a silence, heavy and languorous, settled on me like sleep.

I might have sat there a long time but something moved in the bushes below me. Glancing down I saw the dog staring up at me with his mouth open and his long pink tongue hanging out. "Hey boy. Here boy," I called softly, and gently slapped my knee. The dog made a motion as if to spring back. He stood gazing up eagerly with drawnback ears and a quiver of tension in his matted red forelegs. Slowly he wagged his heavy delicate tail. "Oh well, all right," I said, with a glance at my watch; it was getting on. With an effort I pulled my shoulders from the rock. The dog sprang back. I dropped down lazily. As my feet struck the ground I saw the ball lying under the bush at the base of the fissure in the rock.

I bent over and as I did so I felt a coolness flowing from the shaded crack of the rock. The ball was slick and wet from the slaver of the dog and bits of brown leafmash stuck to it. There seemed to be a space behind the bush, and pushing aside the stiff prickly branches I saw a dark opening behind the leaves. A sudden impulse possessed me, and looking over my shoulder, as if I were performing a forbidden act, I pushed aside the resisting branches and crept into the dark space.

The tense branches sprang back and for a moment I squatted in blackness. Outside I heard the breathing of the dog. Slowly a faint lightness became visible on the ground before the bush. On the flat dirt I saw a smooth pebble. It was quiet in the dark. There was a smell of damp earth and stone. Far away a sound of passing traffic came. Reaching out both hands sideways I felt damp clammy stone against my palms. Slowly I reached up a hand and felt above my head a damp roof of stone. It was very quiet. There was no sound but the ticking of my watch and far away a sound of passing traffic. With one hand held

before me and one hand touching the roof of stone I slowly slid forward a few more steps, above me I felt the stone abruptly end, and emerging from the constraining space I rose slowly with my hand upraised until I was standing at my full height in the dark.

At my feet I could see a faintness of light from the cavemouth but all about me the blackness was impenetrable. Above I could feel nothing with my upstretched hand. My green watchdial glowed on an invisible wrist. It seemed dangerous to proceed any farther, for I had no experience of caves, and indeed I was a little afraid of the dark. So for a time I stood uneasily at the threshold, peering into darkness, and feeling in my heart a wild longing.

And at length I formed a cautious plan. I decided to follow the wall a short distance first in one direction and then in the other, without straying too far from my point of entry, in order to determine the shape and extent of the cave I had discovered. With this rough plan in mind I placed my right hand against the wall of stone, held my left arm straight out before me, and began moving slowly into the dark — scraping one foot along the ground and bringing the other foot up against it, before proceeding to the next step.

The cavewall was damp and had the rough-grained texture of coarse granite. Here and there it was crusted with small hard growths that dropped now and then like pebbles beneath my passing fingers. Across my face I felt a light spiderweb which I quickly brushed away. I had proceeded in this manner for about fifteen paces when the wall unexpectedly gave way to empty space and I nearly fell; for a moment I had the sensation of hovering at the edge of an abyss.

The space proved to be a crevice in the wall, a little narrower than the width of my outstretched arms. Keeping my hands on the two crevice edges I slowly lowered myself to a crouching position. The crevice did not end at the earthen floor but sank lower. Patting about I felt the clear, the unmistakable, the eerily familiar outline of a damp stone step.

You do not prepare for such a journey. Or rather your entire life has been nothing but a secret preparation, a dark connivance between destiny and desire behind your back. And so, one fine day . . . Of course there are omens. There are always omens. At this point it might be wise to insert two or three hundred pages recounting the story of my life. My maternal great-grandfather, a melancholy cobbler from Coblenz . . . one can readily imagine the rest. No, you do not prepare for such a journey. You simply go.

4. The Stone Chamber

Cautiously I began to descend the circling stone stairway, holding my hands lightly against the damp stone walls. The steps were high and roughly hewn; through the worn leather of my soles I felt the bulges and hollows of rock. The air was cool and fresh and smelled of moist stone. Now and then my fingers brushed over soft growths on the walls. Once I glanced up over my shoulder but the darkness stretching up over me seemed to be pressing down on me, and lowering my eyes I continued to descend. It seemed to me that I had been circling down a long, long time when I became aware that I was able to see the dim outline of the dark rough steps. A moment later the stairway ended and I found myself in a small stone chamber, lit by a single flame in a brass lamp on a rude wooden table against one wall.

In the opposite wall was a shadowy door with a gaping keyhole. Upon the table beside the lamp lay a large rusty iron key. On each of three walls hung a picture framed in dusty glass. The three black-looking rectangles of glass reflected the orange lampflame.

I walked over to the table and picked up the lamp. It was shaped like a gravyboat, with a curved handle at one end and a spout at the other, from which rose a slender flame. Gazing once again about the room I went up to the first picture and held the lamp before it as I strained to see. Through the dust of the glass I saw a woman in a blue dress lying in the dark-blue shadow of a yellow haystack. Bright sunshine lay upon the pink cloth of the picnic basket, upon the reddish wisps of hay, upon the dusty road in the distance and the little red roof of the little white house. But in her blue shadow the woman's closed eyes were blue, her cheeks and nose were blue, and her hair, escaping from her bonnet, was deeply blue. The second picture showed a hollow-cheeked man seated at a desk cluttered with dusty books, a half-rolled map, and an astrolabe. Before him a quill pen lay upon a curling sheet of paper. He sat with one gaunt cheek propped against a bony hand while the other hand lay limp upon the unused pen; and from under heavy eyelids his large, melancholy eyes gazed off into the shadows. The third picture showed the dark corner of a moonlit attic. Against the grained wood of the wall a toy soldier sat with his legs stiffly apart, his head tipped back and his eyes closed. Beside him lay a green marble and a broken drum.

When I came to the door I stood before it, holding up the lamp as I examined it with a frown of attention. It was of thick, dark beams stained with patches of damp. It rose a foot above my head and was hung on rusty iron hinges fitted into the stone. Beneath the rusty doorknob was a large keyhole rimmed with rust and partially covered by a tattered spiderweb. As I gazed at the keyhole I seemed to hear a sound as of water lapping a shore. Crouching slightly I bent to peer through the keyhole but I could see only darkness. When I turned I

saw three stone steps turning out of sight and on the rude table the heavy iron key.

I crossed the room and, standing before the table, gazed at the stone steps winding upward into the dark. In the light of my flame a black shadow fell slanting across the topmost step. The corners of the steps were rounded with age; here and there a chip of stone was missing. Each step was quite high. Behind me and far away I heard a sound as of lapping water. Picking up the heavy rusty key I returned to the door, inserted the key, and turned. The door opened slowly and I found myself standing on a hard dirt path that sloped downward into the dark.

5. The Dark Flower

Keeping the door open behind me, and carrying the lamp before me, slowly I made my way down that hard and pebbled path, casting a trembling glow of lampflame that rippled across the brown ground and threw from small stones long trembling shadows that suddenly sprang backward as I passed. The path was steep, and as I advanced I felt myself leaning backward against the pull of the descent. From time to time I looked over my shoulder at the shadowy half-open door, which rose higher and higher as I descended. I reminded myself that at any moment it was possible to turn back, and soothed by this thought I fastened my attention upon the little I was able to make out by the light of my flame. On both sides of the path the ground sloped down into shallow ditches in which I saw shalelike stones and the occasional glimmer of a smooth black puddle. Beyond each ditch a damp tunnelwall, faintly touched by my light, rose up in the black. I was disappointed by the absence of anything unusual or strange, for it seemed a shame to have come so far only to discover mud and rock, and my eyes strained in the dark for the sight of a crystal, a nest, a brilliantly colored stone. When I next looked over my shoulder I could barely see the door far away above me. But the downsloping tunnelpath seemed to pull me along, and in the distance I heard a sound of gently lapping water. I had been pursuing my downward course for some time when I became aware of something rising in the dark before me: and holding up my lamp I came to a great and crumbling archway of stone. The arch rose well above my head and was supported by rough columns joined to the tunnel walls. It was composed of great blocks of stained and pitted stone about two feet in thickness. I searched for a legend cut in the rock but my moving shadow of light revealed only cracks, patches of rusty stain, and crumbling stone. The structure did not appear to be remarkable in any

way, and I was preparing to step through to the other side when I saw, in a crevice of rock beside my left knee, a single dark flower.

The heavy-looking blossom hung upside down from its drooping stalk. The black, velvety petals swelled out slightly at the place where they joined the stalk but came together as they hung down, giving the inverted blossom the shape of a slender bell. In the light of my flame the velvety blossom shimmered with dark purple. Gently I reached out to raise the drooping flower, as if afraid to disturb its heavy slumber, and as I lifted it the slack petals suddenly fell back, exposing, deep in the cup of the flower, a blaze of dark crimson. A circle of slender black stamens bent inward against the shimmering dark-red pistil like dark courtiers surrounding a gleaming queen. When I released the flower it hung down heavily again, seeming to pull with it the drooping stalk; and faintly in the air I detected a dark, heavy odor.

Holding up my lamp I passed under the archway, gazing up at the crumbling stone above me, and then I stepped through to the other side.

6. The Moving Light

At once I became aware of a subtle change. I stood motionless in the dark with my lamp held up before me—my skin prickled—I felt an intense, painful alertness—the ditches on both sides had vanished, the path had vanished, the walls had vanished—I felt an inner widening, as if I were stretching away on all sides—and I realized that I had stepped into a wider and higher place, stretching away on all sides and above into unfathomable blackness. At the same moment I became distinctly aware of the sound of water.

I began to advance slowly, gazing back over my shoulder at the moldering archway that seemed to be withdrawing slowly into the shadows. The hard ground was bare and strewn with pebbles, but as I advanced I began to notice black grassblades and little mosslike clusters; and here and there a black, drooping flower distilled its dark perfume in the air. All at once I saw emerging in the dim light of my flickering flame a low stone wall that rose to the height of my waist. When I reached the wall I heard the sound of water far below. I appeared to be at the edge of a great promontory. Holding out my lamp I saw, far down in the dark, a tiny point of light that I took to be the reflection of my flame. But as I watched, the light began to move along; after a while it moved in the other direction. Having come so far, through so much darkness, I felt that I would never forgive myself if I returned before discovering the meaning of that light; and I had begun to despair of finding my way down when I noticed on my right

a space in the stone, from which a steep stairway descended into the dark.

Slowly I made my way down that second stairway of stone, pressing one hand against the damp stone wall and holding out my lamp before me. The steps were high and crude; a bit of stone crumbled and I heard it rattling down from step to step, stopping suddenly like an extinguished flame. When I looked up over my shoulder I saw three steep steps and part of a fourth rising almost straight up behind. I counted the twentieth step, the fortieth step, the sixtieth step. After the hundredth step I ceased counting, intent only on completing my dark descent: and as I descended I felt the darkness increasing above me, as if it were passing through me and coming out above. In the wavering light of my flame I saw the final stair rise into view. On the hard ground lay clusters of black grass and bits of stone. In the distance I saw a figure carrying a light along the shore, and before long I came to the edge of a black lake or river.

7. The Woman on the Shore

Behind me lay the high stairway, the crumbling archway, the steep tunnel, the half-open door, the stone chamber, the circling stairway, the dazzling day; before me lay the black lake. In the darkness a woman came walking swiftly toward me along the shore. She held a lamp like my own and she wore a long dress that came down to her ankles and blew backward as she walked. Her free arm was pressed to her side, the hand raised to her throat. As she approached I smiled slightly and held up my lamp in greeting. To my surprise she threw me a savage look and continued past me along the shore without a word. All at once she stopped and looked out anxiously over the water, as if in expectation; then she began walking the other way.

"Excuse me," I said almost in a whisper, so as not to frighten her, but as if she had not heard she continued past me; and in the light of our flames I saw her pale, careworn forehead. Again she stopped, and looked out anxiously over the water, and began striding the other way. "Excuse me," I said more loudly, "can you tell me where we are, I don't have much time," and looking at my watch I saw that it was getting on toward half past three. But as if she had not heard me the woman turned toward the water, where I saw emerging from the blackness the dark end of a rowboat and the rounded back of a rower. At once I bent over and picked up three good-sized stones, for I was determined to defend us if necessary. As the boat came nearer I saw the boatman leaning far forward and far back, throwing up great oarscoops of water and barely advancing. At last the boat landed with

a scrape, and the boatman, a thin youth with hollow cheeks, pulled in his oars and sat breathing heavily, coughing from time to time with a damp rattle in his chest.

The woman walked up to the boat and stared eagerly at the empty thwart. I noticed that the oarlocks were loops of thick rope. Still coughing, the thin youth stepped out and began to push ineffectively at the boat. "Wait!" cried the woman, holding out an arm in command or entreaty. The youth continued to push at the boat, which suddenly came unstuck, and stepping back in with dripping pantslegs he prepared the oars. "There's still time!" I cried, but the woman looked at me fiercely, as if in hatred. "All aboard," sighed the melancholy youth, beginning to shove off.

"But why don't you wait for her?" I said, stepping over the side and sitting down with a jolt. "And look at the way you're rowing," I continued, as he leaned far back and far forward, splashing noisily and moving scarcely at all. Slowly the boat pulled away from the shore, and when I looked over my shoulder I saw the woman still standing there, looking out at us as if in supplication. "But why didn't she come with us?" I asked.

"Because," said the youth, panting with his effort, "she can't . . ."

"Can't! Why can't she?"

"I didn't say she can't."

"You did. I heard you."

"No, you interrupted me. I was saying she can't . . ."

"Yes?" I said, leaning forward, since he spoke so quietly I was barely able to hear him.

"... make up her mind," he whispered.

"And you mean she just walks back and forth like that?" —and I gazed with sorrow at the woman who could not make up her mind.

"Not like you," whispered the youth with a sly look, bursting into a cough.

"What do you mean, not like me? I haven't even had time to make up my mind, I don't know what you're talking about," and turning again I was surprised to see how far we had come, for I could no longer see the woman on the shore. "And who is she, anyway? And where are we? I have to get back soon, I haven't got all day," but the youth, gasping with his effort, pulled harder and said no more.

Soon I became aware of a change in the water, which seemed to get thicker and more sluggish. Reaching over the side I dipped my hand in the black, thick, heavy liquid. "Harder!" I whispered sternly, "I haven't got all day," but his head was slumped on his chest, one hand lay in his lap, and the abandoned oar, half-slipped through the oarlock, seemed to rest on the sluggish water without sinking. Yet the boat continued lazily forward, carried along by the thick, lazy ripples

that rose and dipped slowly beneath my flame. And as we drifted toward the shore, I felt my eyelids closing and my head falling forward on my chest. All at once the boat scraped and stopped, throwing me heavily to one side. "What a clumsy rower you are!" I cried, but the youth sat gazing at me so forlornly that softening my tone I added: "Of course, it's a very tiring job." With a long sigh he stepped out of the boat and began to pull it around. "Just a minute," I said, stepping out of the boat onto the shore. But as if he had a pressing engagement, already he was pulling through the sluggish water, leaning far forward and far back. "But wait!" I cried, "I have to get back," but already I was turning around to face the great cavemouth before me.

8. The Three Doors

A small stream issuing from the cave flowed slowly in a pebbled bed to the sluggish lake. There was a sound of slow water flowing over stones. Dark flowers beside the stream hung drowsily over the water as if lulled by the soothing murmur: and a dark odor of flowers floated in the murmurous dark.

Holding my lamp before me I stepped into the cave. Shadows of flame rose and fell on the dark stone walls on both sides of me and pieces of broken flame glistened in the narrow stream on my left. Dark flowers grew beside the water. I had not advanced far when the cave branched into two tunnels, one to the left and one to the right. The stream flowed from the left branch, and after a slight hesitation I followed the water. But soon the stream ended in a small black pool, fed by a slender waterfall that trickled along the black wet wall. I continued along the tunnel beyond the pool, trying to peer ahead into the dark. After a while I noticed that the walls of the tunnel were growing narrower and smoother, the ground seemed softer, and looking down I saw that I was walking on a strip of dark carpet. Ahead I saw a faint glimmer, and soon I came to a door in the wall.

Above the door a small flame burned in a niche. The rough-grained wood was stained with patches of damp. The rusty doorknob above the keyhole cast a black, elongated, triangular shadow across the weathered grain. I reached out to grasp the doorknob and as the tips of my fingers came into contact with the stony metal I felt a sensual confusion, I snatched away my hand, and bending closer I examined with a frown the motionless, precise shadow, the artfully painted grains of wood, the carefully executed doorknob with its skillful suggestions of depth and shadow. I passed the false door and came to a second door. Between the painted doorknob and the painted

door stretched an intricately painted spiderweb in which sat a black, painted spider. I passed the second door and came to a third. Dampness had worn away parts of the paint, allowing the stone to show through; a portion of rusty doorknob had run trickling into the false wood. I passed the third door and continued along the hallway, looking for the next door. But I saw only the stone walls, which seemed to grow rougher, under my feet I felt the smoothness end, and looking down I saw the hard, pebbled ground.

I continued somewhat reluctantly along this roughening pathway, which began to turn and wind, and after a while I came to another branching of the way. Before me I saw two tunnels winding into the dark; in the depths of the tunnels I could make out further branchings. I felt I might lose my way forever in those black, intricate windings, and remembering the other branch of the main tunnel I turned around and began walking back. Soon I felt the softness under my feet, and coming to the first door on my left I stopped to gaze at it in the light of my upheld lamp. Through the watery doorknob a portion of dark stone was visible. 'Very clever,' I said aloud, as if someone might be watching, and reached out a finger to draw across the painted wall. Against my fingertip I felt the sudden roundness of a doorknob. Bending forward I gazed at the real doorknob, upon which a portion of stone wall had been artfully painted.

I turned the knob and pushed. The door opened easily. Three steps carpeted in dark red led down to a narrow hallway with three doors on the left, three doors on the right, and a seventh door at the end. Above the seventh door a small flame burned in a niche. Slowly I made my way along the carpeted hallway, trying each of the doors in turn. The doors on the left and right were locked. The seventh door opened, and I found myself at the threshold of a great stone hall or cavern-chamber, stretching away and reaching high overhead.

9. The Hall of Shadows

The chamber was filled with thick cylindrical pillars that rose from the hard earthen floor and disappeared in the darkness above. The countless pillars were spaced at what appeared to be random intervals of about three to five feet, but otherwise formed no pattern that I could perceive. There were no uninterrupted and inviting vistas; between the space of any two pillars another pillar and parts of pillars always closed off the view. Here and there appeared a short pathway flanked by three or four pillars on each side, but these were brief and accidental regularities within an apparently irregular design. The pillars were dimly illuminated by small flames burning steadily in

little arch-shaped niches, cut into opposite sides; a niche always faced a smooth portion of the opposing pillar. By this means the pillars were darkly illuminated from the base to a height of about ten feet, above which the illumination faded into half-shadow before passing into upper blackness. The foot of each pillar melted into semidarkness and the floor between pillars was dim and shadowy.

I saw no way of penetrating this maze, which everywhere seemed to invite my gaze only to turn it aside. Yet each pillar that obstructed my view seemed the teasing concealment of a pathway that lay just beyond. I reasoned that if I kept the door carefully in view I might venture beyond the first few pillars without risk of losing my way, and with this plan in mind I stepped through the first pair, glancing over my shoulder at the door.

Beyond the first pillars a third one blocked my way. As I stepped to the right of it I looked back and saw that my view of the door was reduced to less than half by one of the first pillars. I quickly passed beyond the obstructing pillar and, circling to the other side, looked back, where I could now see a different strip of door. Before me, in every direction, a wilderness of pillars stretched away. My eye arranged in pairs the pillars spread out in front of me, though nothing save proximity connected any one with any other; I then stepped through a pair that seemed to lie directly in my path. When I glanced back, I was surprised to see only a pattern of overlapping pillars. Alarmed, irritated, and determined not to lose sight of the door, I decided to make my way back at once, and stepped unhesitatingly through the pair of pillars through which I had just come.

Before me I saw only thick, dimly lit pillars, with others half-visible behind. It appeared that I had made a mistake, and turning to one side I stepped around another pillar. Beyond I saw only great rounded pillars, stretching away. I seemed to be lost, though tantalizingly near my point of entrance; if I advanced in any direction I was likely to lose my way entirely. Despite the many small flames the hall gave a general impression of darkness, for only a small portion of the pillars themselves was illuminated and the floor lay completely in shadow, and for the first time since my descent I felt a dreamlike fear as I imagined myself wandering forever among the cold colossal pillars of a dim and endless hall.

I summoned all my strength to suppress this fear, knowing that my sole chance lay in calm and alertness. With some dim notion of crushing my anxiety by an immediate task, I strode up to a pillar and began to examine it in detail. It was about three feet in diameter. The surface was smooth though unpolished, and chalklike in texture; a faint white dust showed on my fingertips. I could not scratch the surface with my nail. Slowly I walked all around the pillar, gazing in

every direction, where I saw pillar on pillar stretching away. My shadow sprang up against pillars as I passed. I felt frustrated and impatient; it now began to seem that my only chance was to attempt to walk in a straight line, in the hope that I would come to a wall. With this dubious plan in mind I began to walk slowly away from the pillar I had just circled, holding up my lamp as if an increase in illumination might be useful, and noticing my shadow rising dimly and distortedly on several pillars about me.

I had begun to pass the next pillar, looking carefully all about me in the hope of seeing the door, and at the same time trying to memorize the precise location of this pillar in relation to the pillar from which I was setting out, when I heard what sounded like a nearby whisper. I was about to cry "Who's there?" but instantly suppressed it, standing motionless, looking about in a state of intense alertness, and fingering nervously the three stones that I still carried in my pocket from the shore.

The whisper was repeated, and this time it seemed to issue from behind the pillar directly before me. In the utter stillness that followed I had the unnerving sensation that all the pillars were listening intently. So unbearable did I find my own tenseness of nerve that I resolved to end it at once, and with a sudden rapid motion I stepped around the pillar. I saw only the great pillars stretching away. At the same moment I heard the whisper repeated; this time it clearly issued from the other side of the pillar I had half-circled. I swiftly returned to my original point—but I saw only the great pillars, stretching away.

By now I was angry and fearful. I was about to cry out in a harsh voice when again I heard a distant whisper, which sounded like "sur sur sur" and which seemed now to issue directly from the pillar itself. It hadn't occurred to me before this moment that the pillars might be hollow. I strode up to the pillar and rapped on it with my fist; it was solid stone. "Where are you?" I said angrily, in a loud tone that echoed aryou aryou aryou, while I stared accusingly at the pillar before me, upon which my distorted shadow stood up clearly. I raised my lamp. At this moment a curious sensation seized me: I felt that something terribly wrong had happened, though I did not yet know what it was. Only as I stepped back from the whispering pillar did I realize obscurely that my arm shadowed on the stone had not lifted when I raised my lamp. I now perceived that my shadow had not changed when I stepped back, and as I stood motionless I saw the shadow raise its right arm slowly and make a gesture as if to beckon me closer.

It was a thin shadow somewhat above the middle height, with a well-shaped head whose hair fitted close to the skull and was visible as a slight waviness at the sides and top. He appeared to be wearing a suit-jacket, as I thought from a certain trimness about the shoulders

and from the way his wide sleeve hung from his thin raised wrist. When he turned his head slightly I saw the strong line of a nose, a sharp jawline, and a somewhat withdrawn chin. There was about him a grave and gentle air that drew my trust, and taking a single large stride I stepped up to within a foot of the pillar. The shadow began to whisper again and continued to beckon me closer. I stepped directly up to the pillar. Yet still he continued to whisper, and began pointing at the lower part of his head. I was perplexed until, turning his profile toward me, he pointed directly at his lips. Then I stepped back slightly, and bending my head down to him I pressed my ear directly against the cold, smooth stone. And now I heard faint words, which rose above the threshold of hearing only to drop below, and pressing my ear almost painfully against the stone I heard: "Thank you, sir. We shadows have but shadow-voices."

"Who are you?" I asked, stepping back from the pillar. Then pressing my ear once more against the stone I heard: "I am the shadow of Michael Crane." There followed a long, heartrending sigh, and then: "This place is the Hall of Shadows." All about me I seemed to hear long, deep sighs; and now on the surrounding pillars I saw dim shadows, gathering about as if to listen.

"But tell me," I said, "who are all these shadows, and how did they come here?" and once again I pressed my ear against the stone.

"Ah," he said with an accent of bitterness, "we shadows are a despised and rejected race!" And then: "You seem perplexed, O human visitor. Permit me to explain. When a body dies its shadow descends to this hall, where it continues a shadow-life. Here reside the shadows of Alexander and Homer, of all the soldiers of Alexander's armies, of all the famous and the unsung dead; here one day your shadow will reside."

In the solemn silence I looked about in a sort of fearful awe; then turning back to the shadow of Michael Crane I asked, almost in a whisper: "One shadow to a pillar?" and once again I pressed my ear against the stone.

"You forget, O human visitor, that shadows are incorporeal, and lack the inconveniences attendant upon bodily existence. Freed from the constraints of corporeal being, we float at will through the air. The shadows of departed bodies prefer to dwell in the dark regions of the upper hall, up there above the narrow region of light. That faint wind: do you hear it? It is the eternal whispering of those multitudes of shadows."

Raising my head I tried to peer into the upper darkness, where now I seemed to hear a faint sighing or whispering, but I saw only the darkening pillars soaring out of sight. Then once again I pressed my ear against the stone.

“Thus far I have spoken only of the shadows of departed bodies, and not of the shadows of the bodies of the living. Know, then, O human visitor: in the upper world it sometimes comes to pass that a shadow will break away from its body; and after a time of passing up and down in the world, and to and fro in the world, it will descend to this place.” And again he sighed, and then continued: “Now on occasion the desire will come upon us, even here, to extend ourselves in the light. This is most true of those shadows whose advent is most recent and who are still to some extent infected with the laws of the upper world. Hence these pillars, of which the number, although not negligible, is trifling in comparison with the inconceivable immensity of the innumerable shadows themselves. The pillars are also convenient for making oneself known to corporeal visitors, as in the present instance. But excuse my many words! We shadows are a windy though harmless race. Permit me to guide you past these pillars, where you may continue on your way; or permit me to show you the door you have lost.”

I thanked him warmly for his kind offer of assistance and assured him that I had no immediate intention of turning back. I said that far from being tedious his words had wakened in me a lively curiosity; and I begged him to tell me how he himself had come to be here.

When I pressed my ear against the pillar I heard a deep sigh, and after a pause: “Like all shadows, I was a happy shadow. In the sunshine of my days I darkened with delight. Recollect, O human visitor, that a child is friends with his shadow as an adult never is; a deep and fierce intimacy springs up between them such as two bodies can never know. I played side by side with my master; I read his books; I committed his secret crimes. In comparison to our double unanimity the famous act of corporeal union is an instance of estrangement. But though a shadow be the mimic of his master, he is granted certain freedoms denied to the envious boy. He admired my ability to stretch myself across the yard at sunset or to contract to a mere nothing at noon, to leap up against a wall, to climb a sharp picket fence and continue on the other side, to adapt myself voluptuously to the bends and ripples of a room or lawn, to vanish into the wide shadow at the side of the house. It was as if he perceived in me a suppler, more agile, less restricted version of himself, while at the same time observing and triumphing in my utter dependence. I for my part delighted in my dependence and in the many freedoms granted to the incorporeal. But a time comes when the shadow is forgotten. The growing child neglects the faithful companion of his earlier days, who yet remains bound to his tyrannical and indifferent master. Among the race of shadows this unhappy change is known as the Great Betrayal. Innumerable reasons for it have been adduced, one of the more

fanciful being that increase in height removes the eyes of the body from the ground. Be that as it may, the betrayal is all the more hurtful in that increased attention is paid by the growing child to his reflection, which is no doubt one cause of the notorious enmity between shadows and reflections. Most shadows accept their fate with weary resignation and live out their terrestrial lives in the vain but inextinguishable hope of reestablishing the lost harmony. Yet some shadows refuse to accede to what is at best a condition of thankless servitude, and live in perpetual anticipation of an opportunity to elude what I trust you will permit me to describe as the tyranny of the corporeal. I, sir, was such a shadow. Need I say more? I watched; I waited; I nurtured my secret spite. When chance came, it found me prepared. Silently, in full sunlight, I slipped away, unnoticed. Now I wander restlessly in this hall, listening to the idle talk of shadows. Sir! Permit me to ask you a single question. Have you heard of the man called Michael Crane?"

"No," I said gently, shaking my head; and once again I pressed my ear against the cold pillar. And again I heard a deep sigh, that was almost a groan, and then: "But come, sir! I have promised to guide you on your way."

At these words the shadows on nearby pillars slid upward into the dark. I saw the shadow of Michael Crane slide sideways from the pillar, disappearing into empty space. Almost at once he reappeared on a pillar just beyond. I strode up to him, and again he slid from the pillar, and disappeared, and reappeared on a pillar beyond. In this manner he led me slowly through the gloomy hall, with its dark and whispering ceiling. Only once did he stop and, beckoning me to him, point to a pillar in the near distance, where there stood a shadow who appeared to be wearing a robe, and who turned his head and gesticulated forcefully while other shadows on nearby pillars seemed to listen with attention. When I bent my ear to the shadow of Michael Crane he said: "Behold the famed shadow of Aristotle, beguiling the tedium of eternity with philosophical speculation. See how they crowd around him. He teaches that shadow-lives are real lives, of which transitory human bodies are the unreal shadows. And see there: on that pillar, somewhat removed, that seated shadow, with his great head bowed. I do not know. But some say it is the shadow of Plato, who sits forever in gloomy silence, mourning the loss of earthly life."

We continued on our way, and it was not long before I saw in the spaces between distant pillars a flickering cavern wall. As we approached I saw what appeared to be high, narrow crevices winding into the rock. I was soon past the final pillars. I stood on the strip of ground between the pillars and the cavern wall, before a soaring crevice wide enough for two men to enter. The shadow of Michael

Crane stood out clearly on a smooth pillar facing a flame, and beckoned me to him. "That is the way," he said, pointing at the opening in the wall. "I can accompany you no farther. May a safe journey befall you, and the delights of discovery. And should you ever return to the upper world, remember that you have seen the shadow of Michael Crane. Forgive a shadow's many windy words. Hail and farewell."

Stepping back, I thanked him and was about to question him further when I saw him slip from the pillar and appear farther away. "But listen!" I shouted after him. "What did you mean, if I ever return?" But the shadow of Michael Crane had vanished into the shadows below or the shadows above, and I heard only a soft whispering or sighing in the empty spaces high up in the dark.

10. The Black Velvet Curtains

I entered the crevice and found myself in a dark, flickering passageway between towering walls of stone. The winding path was fitfully illuminated by somber torches, thrust into iron rings in the walls high above my head. The flamelight beneath each torch diminished rapidly into shadowy dimness and darkness; in effect I was journeying from glow to glow through long spaces of dark. The darkness was increased by the continual turning of the passageway, for a torch was often shut out of view by a great bend of rock. The winding path gave a sense of almost oppressive narrowness because of the great height of the walls, which soared out of sight into the darkness above, but in fact the way at its narrowest was broad enough for two men walking comfortably side by side. From time to time I heard faint scratching or scurrying sounds, which seemed to come from the side of the path; once I had the impression that they came from high up on a wall.

I had passed beyond the dim glow of a torch and was making my way in the winding dark, helped only by my upheld lamp, when the path turned abruptly to the right, and I came to a halt. On the path directly before me, at the outer edge of light from a torch beyond, was a small creature about the size of a shoe. I had never seen the like before. It appeared to be sitting, but I noticed that its forelegs were nearly three times the height of its very short hindlegs and so gave the body a marked slant. It had a small head scarcely wider than its body, with sharp upright ears and little black eyes; its short, flattish snout ended in a black moist nose with large vertical nostrils. Except for its nose and the very end of its tail, it was entirely covered with short dark-brown hairs that gave it a faintly slick appearance in the

flickering flamelight. Its front paws were delicate and finely articulated. It stood for several moments as if transfixed by my flame; then it scampered away with an odd, awkward lope, climbed a wall, and disappeared into a small crack or hole.

I continued on my way, keeping an eye out for these creatures, though failing to encounter another, and wondering whether it would be possible to capture one and bring it back with me. I had begun to feel thirsty after all my walking, and I hoped to come across another stream or even a trickle of water along a wall. But the path was hopelessly dry, there was not a blade of black grass in sight. The passageway continued to twist and turn, as if it were burrowing its way with difficulty through the stone. I had begun to wonder how many of these turns remained when rounding a jagged edge of wall I was surprised to see in the near distance the end of the passageway, which appeared as a high narrow crack of dimness between two darknesses. In the opening I saw a figure leaning against a wall.

As I came closer I saw that it was a man with a rumpled white beard. "Good evening," I said quietly as I stepped up to him, but his eyes were closed, his head was bowed, he leaned back against one side of the opening with his arms crossed on his chest and both legs carelessly extended as if to keep himself from falling.

I stepped past him and found myself in a great hall, dimly lit by high torches placed halfway to the shadowy ceiling, which appeared to be about sixty feet high. All about the hall, dim figures lay sleeping. A faint sound of slow breathing, mingled with gentle snoring, made a soft and pleasing murmur in the air. In the far depths of the hall the darkness seemed deeper, as if the blackness banished by the high torches had gathered more thickly there: and in that deeper darkness, untouched by torchlight, a black mass loomed.

Holding up my lamp I made my way slowly toward the mass, stepping over stretched-out figures that stirred in their sleep. As I passed one slumbering woman in a dark, full dress, her heavy eyelids half-opened and she gave a slow, drowsily voluptuous smile, then her eyes closed and she pressed her cheek into the softness of her upper arm. On the smooth stone floor a sleeping youth lay beside a sleeping girl, their faces turned toward each other and their hands clasped at their thighs.

Some of the women lay in poses of careless and somnolent wantonness, of innocent voluptuousness. The dark dress of one woman, asleep on her side with her knees raised, came down almost to her ankles, but as I passed I could not help noticing that in the back her dress had worked its way up, exposing to view her bare, full, slumbering thighs, all the way up to the tight, fleshy incurving at the base of her buttocks. One woman in a long dark dress lay asleep on

her back with her head turned to the side, her cheek resting on the thick blackness of her rich-flowing hair; one long and shockingly white hand, the fingers slightly downcurved, rested languorously on her dark lap.

As I crossed the drowsy hall and drew near the black mass I saw that it was a great four-poster bed reaching high overhead. It was set in the middle of a raised platform with long steps leading up along two sides. Drooping figures lay sprawled on the steps; others sat on the platform with their heads leaning back against the base of the bed, or lay with their arms dangling over the sides.

Thick black velvet curtains hung all about the bed, shutting in the bedposts. At the top of each post was a carved ebon owl; and high above rose a black, domed canopy, surmounted by a great carved raven with its head tucked under its wing.

I climbed the three stairs of the platform, stepping over a sprawling figure, and began to walk around the great bed, holding up my lamp. Above the towering curtains was a black border painted with dim scenes that glimmered in faint blues, greens, and silvers. The covered bedposts emerged above the curtains and were carved with small figures I could not discern by my feeble flame; but above each post I could see the carved, gleaming claw and the sharp, upright ears of the jetblack owl. At the base of the curtains was a fringe of black silken tassels that brushed the platform.

As I began to walk along the second lengthy side of the bed, stepping carefully over heads and legs, I noticed a slight bunching at the base of the curtain. Bending over I lifted the heavy black velvet and saw a step covered with crimson velvet. The lifting revealed a division in the curtain; when I widened the division I saw two more steps leading up. Gently mounting the first step, I patted about for the upper parting of the velvet. I made a small and silent opening with my hand; and holding my breath I thrust in my head and my trembling upheld lamp.

I was standing near the foot of a vast bed, covered with a black velvet bedspread stretching away into darkness. Above me rose a domed canopy painted with many figures. Scattered about the spread, in the dim circle of my light, stood pieces of heavy, tilted furniture, partially sunk in the softness. I saw an old couch with an open book lying facedown upon a pillow, a round wooden table with two wooden chairs over one of which a black garment was draped, and a high-backed writing desk littered with books and papers. Books lay in fallen piles on the bedspread and in leaning precarious piles on the round wooden table and both chairs.

Between the bedposts to my left was a footboard that rose halfway to the canopy and was fitted with bookshelves filled with leaning rows

of books. On the portion of curtain above the bookcase was a dim scene woven in colored thread. It showed a man with a long yellowish beard lying asleep on the floor of a forest with his head on the mossy root of a tree. Beside him lay a fallen wooden mug, a scattering of acorns, and a long rusty rifle. The black bedposts were carved with an intricate pattern of little figures such as yew trees, inverted torches, hourglasses, and willows hanging over pools.

The long curtain across from me showed a pale shepherd on a hillside beneath a silver moon. Beside him, leaning over him and gazing at his slumbering face, was a white lady in an azure mantle embellished with stars and planets.

The black velvet spread stretched away to the right. In the darkness beyond the glow of my lamp I seemed to hear a faint breathing. "Hello?" I said softly, but the slumberer did not stir, and without further hesitation I climbed the remaining stairs and stepped into the soft chamber.

11. A Meeting

My feet sank up to the anklebones and a nearby bookpile toppled soundlessly as the velvet curtains fell heavily in place behind me. I took a second step and plunged deeper into the black softness. All at once I remembered my dirty shoes, and bending over awkwardly I unlaced and removed each one with my free hand. Then holding the shoes pinched between thumb and forefinger I began to walk slowly and cautiously along that soft and sagging floor, sinking deeply at each step and lifting each foot delicately before lowering it into the downy dark. Books lay scattered along the velvet spread, and as I advanced I passed a dark sock draped over the leg of a fallen wooden chair, a stringless lute lying across a lacquered chessboard, a cracked plate on which lay a cigar stub and a jack of spades. The long black curtain on my right displayed in pale blue, pale green, and shimmering silver a garden of lush-petaled flowers, heavilyladen fruit trees, languishing lovers, fountains in which naked nymphs were bathing, pleached bowers, mossy grottoes, and mazy paths.

From the dark a towering headboard of books began to emerge. It rose from the bedspread to the canopy, and at one end a slender ladder leaned against an upper row. Under the ladder a large hourglass with thick wooden supports lay on its side. Great pillows like black waves swelled against the base of the bookcase, and in the flickering darkness I could faintly see, swelling beneath the black velvet bedspread, a slumbering form.

The sleeper lay on his back with his head turned slightly away.

One bare forearm lay across his chest. His face, emerging more clearly in the light of my approaching lamp, gave a double impression of softness and strength. The cheek turned toward me was heavy and plumpish, but the line of the cheekbone stood out clearly beneath the closed eye. The strong, broad nose, slightly fleshy at the wings, showed a firm, thrusting ripple of bone in the ridge. His chin was clearly articulated, but the sharp line of his jaw quickly gave way to a slight skinpouch that swelled from his wide throat. The forearm lying across his chest was broad and thickwristed though somewhat too fleshy; it was matted with long black hairs that looked as if they had been combed neatly crosswise over the back of the arm. An open book lay face downward on his plump belly and rose and fell gently as he breathed.

As I watched, his head turned slowly toward me. I drew back slightly, but the eyes remained closed. Slowly the skin of the forehead tightened into a frown. The lips and nostrils began to quiver faintly, a tension appeared in the lips, slowly they began to part. And now the mouth began to open, wider and wider. It pushed up the skin beneath the eyes until the eyes were tense tight lines; it pushed down the jaw until the jaw was crushed into heavy folds of neckskin. And still the mouth strove to open wider: deep in the dark cavern of his yawn I saw black flame-shadows playing over rich moist rednesses and gleams of white, a line of shadow cut across the dangling quivering uvula—and still the straining and insatiable mouth struggled to open wider, as if it were trying to crush the twisted features painfully into the smallest possible space. All at once the mouth closed, the tense tormented face fell into heavy slackness. The heavy eyelids sprang open. Moist fierce melancholy black eyes stared at me for an instant before narrowing in the light of my flame: and looking me slowly up and down, fixing me at last with a keen glance, and raising one eyebrow slightly, which caused that eye to narrow as if in shrewd appraisal, he said with an air of amusement: “Morpheus, I presume?”

“Morpheus! No, what makes you . . . But who are you?”

“I?”

My question appeared to amuse him highly, and shifting his head to a more comfortable position, and crossing his legs beneath the covers, he replied:

“Oh, a denizen of the dark, a magnifico of murk, a malingerer, a ne’er-do-well, a fair chessplayer, a dabbler in this and that. A gentleman of dubious extraction and uncertain means. A charming rogue, a poor fellow down on his luck, a man more sinned against than sinning. A simple country lad. just an ordinary guy. Lover of the black flame of the night, an idle dreamer of a summer’s day, a loafer in the poolhalls of the soul. A dangerous companion, a trusty guide. Not

the sort of fellow you'd want to introduce to your sister. And who are you?"

Motionless from his pillow he fixed me with his darkeyed gaze. His jaw, closeshaven, gleamed in the flamelight.

"I?"

Feeling the test or challenge in his gaze, I assumed an air of nonchalance and said carefully:

"Oh, you might say a voyager. An explorer. A wanderer in the dark." I paused. "Not the sort of fellow you'd want to introduce to your wife."

"A wag! I' faith, a wag! We shall get on, my friend. I am Morpheus." He thrust up a hand.

"Morpheus! I thought . . . Carl Hausman. So you're Morpheus . . ." Putting down my shoes carefully so that they lay on their sides, and switching the lamp to my left hand, I bent over and shook his bigboned, softpalmed hand. Slowly I straightened up and stood awkwardly above him, holding my lamp before me, feeling my feet deepsunk in the feathery dark.

He worked himself up into a half-sitting position, turning the black pillow vertically against the bookshelves and plumping it up with his hands. Leaning back heavily against the pillow he raised one knee under the black blanket and rested upon it the wrist of his right arm, the heavy hand dangling.

"Who knows not Morpheus, that tender lad? His hollow cheeks give him the appearance of one who perpetually sips nectar through a straw. One slender hand lies crossed over his alabaster chest and in the other hand he bears a copy of the *Theaetetus* with which he discreetly shields his private parts. It's the wetdream of a Victorian vicar with a dubious passion for Greek.

Who knows not Morpheus, that tender lad?

His eyes are bloodshot, and his breath is bad.

But sit down, voyager, take a load off your feet. And stick that lamp or whatever it is somewhere or other why don't you. It makes you look like the wistful offspring of the Statue of Liberty."

He handed me a soft pillow. Nearby, a tilted and sunken armchair stood with its worn back facing the headboard of books. I placed the lamp doubtfully on the sloping arm of the chair and then on the ledge of a low bookshelf. I placed the pillow against the side of the tilted chair and sat down gratefully on the bed with outstretched legs. My legs were at right angles to Morpheus' legs and my dark-socked feet reached to within a foot of his blanketed knee.

Morpheus reached behind a pillow and extracted a half-filled winebottle and half a loaf of hardcrusted bread. He reached up to a

shelf above his head and brought down a brown mug with two white roughened places where a handle had broken off. He turned it this way and that, gazing at it with one eyebrow raised. He lifted a corner of sheet and wiped the mug on the inside with two quick turns of his wrist. Then he held up the mug for me to see and said: "Twill serve." He placed the mug on the bed and worked the cork up out of the bottle with his thumbs. Then holding the edge of the bottle over the rim of the mug he poured out the wine, stopping once to hold up the bottle and measure its contents with his eye. When he had finished pouring he handed me the winemug and the bread and raising his eyes abruptly he said: "You wouldn't happen to have a smoke?" "Sorry." "Ah well." He shrugged. "Eat, lad. 'Sdeath, you look as if you need it." He held up the bottle of wine. "To our meeting." I nodded, held up my mug, then took a drink of wine and bit hungrily into the bread. Morpheus threw back his head and took a long swallow. He leaned abruptly forward, wiped the back of his hand across his mouth, and loudly smacked his lips.

" 'Tis a little on the sharp side to give an edge to wit and there's sweetness in it to take away care. 'Tis cool on the tongue for the slaking of thirst, warm in the belly to melt away sorrow, and hot in the blood to fire up the soul. 'Tis a prick to lust can stiffen a man and thaw a wench, making Jack rise and Joan fall, yet hath it this justice in it, that Joan will be up when Jack won't stand, making his fall her rise; for she's most melting when he's most hard, yet will it go hard with him when he's most soft. 'Tis wine gives wings to fancy and maketh every thought a Pegasus to strike Hippocrenes from stony brains. 'Tis the milk o' the Muses, making the nine lasses leap lively under the moon. Why, she's your tenth Muse, man, and none too coy, who'll bed a poet at twelve o' the clock and beget an epic ere morning. Aye, what though she be an easy wench who knows not nay but does the deed nimbly with every he in Christendom, yet hath she withal the soul of a true Christian lass, preaching to all men the sermon on the mount, giving to him that asketh of her, turning swords into ploughshares, and off'ring the nether cheek. Let her be ever so loose in her grammar, knowing not how to decline *homo*, yet is she a great fosterer of speech, and hath a love of words would charm the soul out of a stone, loosening the shyest tongue, firing the dullest brain, and making thought to run and word follow after till both join hands i' the one dance, kick heels in a gay coranto, and tumble together i' the hay. What say'st thou, lad? Woo't want a fitter mistress to tickle thyself withal?"

"Oh, I say the two of you must get along nicely, Morpheus, for you too are a lover of words. But you're a wag yourself."

"Aye, and a gay dog, too."

"That's a storyteller."

"What?"

"The bearer of a tale."

"Nay, that's a wench without a petticoat. I like thy wit, lad. 'Tis like a country maid: she peeps shyly out, and draws a man on by keeping hid what he fain would see. And so you've come down to Papa Morpheus."

"I hardly knew where I was going. One step led to another, and before I knew it . . ."

"It's not often I'm tracked to my lair."

"There've been others, then."

"Oh, an occasional weary wayworn wanderer comes stumbling up against my bedposts. More often I bump into 'em on my rounds."

"Why, are there many?"

Grandly Morpheus swept out an arm. "Wide is the gate, and broad the way, that leadeth unto Morpheus." His hand dropped to the bed. "But you should stick around. I'll show you a thing or two. Give you a little tour of the town." He threw back his head and took a long swallow, finishing the wine. "Drink up, lad. 'Twill warm thy blood."

I took a long drink from my mug and lowered the mug. Wine beat in my temples.

"And those people outside. Who are they?"

"Oh, riffraff of one kind and another. Local fauna. Not from up there." He jerked his thumb at the ceiling.

"Local fauna, up there" — I laughed, shaking my head. "Frankly, it's all bewildering. I ask myself: am I really here? And your language!" I burst into loud, excited laughter.

Morpheus drew himself up; his nostrils widened and a vein beat in his neck.

"Who am I that I should limit myself to the rotting carcass of some shriveled decade or the bare bones of a century? I will roam freely through the ages with my snout in the air, performing my depredations as the wind blows. All words are my patrimony."

"Don't be offended, Morpheus. My laughter wasn't mockery. I know you're a lover of words."

Morpheus leaned forward. His black eyes flashed.

"Lover of words and lecher of words, licking my tongue into the dark crannies of syllables, lapping up secret juices, rooting with my swine-snout in the warm moist furrows, guzzling and snorting, licking my chops."

"Easy, Morpheus. I see what you mean. Because I too am a lover of words, even though I'm from up there and my wit peeps shyly out. But try to understand how bewildering it's been for me. Just this afternoon I was sitting on a warm bench, in the sun, minding my own

business, and now . . . 'Sdeath! it feels odd, believe me. But I intended no insult and if I've offended you, please accept my apology."

" 'Tis a speech well becomes thee, lad. Tush, mind not Morpheus. All's well."

I took another drink, draining my mug.

"I say I'm Carl Hausman. But I wonder whether I lost my way in the Hall of Shadows, maybe I'm really the shadow of Michael Crane, of course I'm a little drunk, I've noticed that. This wine is excellent. Are you really Morpheus?"

"The very same." He nodded slowly and with exaggerated politeness, lowering his eyelids. Then lifting his eyelids suddenly without lifting his slightly lowered head, he stared at me with his black piercing eyes, in which little lampflames were visible. He held me tight in the grip of his gaze: dark eyes of a dark soul, watching. The lampflames fluttered. I jerked my eyes away. Morpheus lightly laughed.

"Would you care to check with the higher authorities?" He moved a forefinger twice in a brisk short arc and lifted a fist to his ear. "Hello. Morph speaking. Olympus. What's that? Listen sister I don't have all day. Ain't it the truth. Right. Thanks, sweetie." He lowered his fist from his ear and made a single rapping motion. He looked at me and shrugged. "It seems the Thunderer's out and his wife won't answer. Golden showers are predicted." He yawned slightly, stretched, and held up the bottle, turning it slowly as he stared at it in the light of the flame. He sighed. "Empty, I'm afraid." He placed the bottle sideways on the bed. "All gone." He frowned, drumming his fingers against the spread.

"What's that thing there? Under that pillow there. No, not there: there."

"Eh? Zounds!" Morpheus raised his eyebrows and pressed a hand to his chest. "Do I wake? Do I sleep? Is't all a dream? Ah, lad, lad, what an eye!"

Slowly, delicately, with thumb and forefinger, Morpheus drew forth from beneath the plump pillow a gleaming bottle of wine.

He held it up, turning it this way and that, admiring it in the light of the flame. The bottle was three-quarters full. Suddenly his eyes filled with consternation and turning to me wide-eyed he said: "Holy Mother of God and Saints of Glory! Sure it's the devil's own trick for fetchin' me soul to the bad place, and I after thinkin' there was no harm surely." Slowly his features relaxed. Placing a hand over his heart he sighed with relief. "Lord a mercy me. What a start it gave me." He turned to me, beaming broadly. " 'Tis but a trick o' the flame, lad. My eyes deceived me." He held out the bottle for my inspection and said earnestly: "Why, see here, Carl. 'Tis nothing but a bottle of

milk, reddened a little by the light o' the flame." Thrusting the bottle between his blanketed thighs he worked the cork out deftly with his thumbs. The bottom of the cork gleamed darkly. Bending toward me he tipped the bottle over my lifted mug and poured loudsplashing dark-red wine. He held up the streaming bottle. "To milk everlasting." He clashed his bottle against my mug and raised the bottle high. "To mirth, midnight, and measure in all things." He threw back his head and drank deep. Wine gleamed on his chin. I took a long swallow. "Heigh ho," said Morpheus, "it's a hard life." He raised his winebottle and said:

"Heigh, ho, this life is most jolly,
Come tumble me Bess and tickle me Polly.
Leave wise men to wisdom and fools to their folly,
Sing heigh, ho, the heart o' the holly.

What say'st thou, lad? Dost not like the sweet sound o' the genuine Elizamorphean?"

"You're too much for me, Morpheus. I capitulate." I raised my mug high. "Heigh ho, this life is most jolly."

"Why, so it is, lad, so it is. It gladdens my heart to hear thee say so.

Heigh, ho, this life is most jolly,
You can have Stephen and I will take Molly.
O you take the subway and I'll take the trolley,
Sing heigh, ho, the heart o' the holly.

But drink up, lad. Thou sipp'st at thy wine like a maid peeping o'er her fan at the leg of a man.

Heigh, ho, this life is most jolly,
She asked me for candy, I gave her my lolly.
I wanted to serve but she wanted to volley,
Sing heigh, ho, the heart o' the holly.

Well it's heigh, ho, this life is most jolly,
If you'll be my Trilby I'll be your Svengali.
O I'll be your Humbert if you'll be my Dolly,
Sing heigh, ho, the heart o' the holly.

Yes it's heigh, ho, this life is most jolly,
Dan Petrarch once fell for a hot tamale.
No tickee no washee. Goodbye now. So solly.
Sing heigh, ho, the heart o' the holly.

Heigh ho, here's to the hard life. Drink up, lad. Drink up, sweet fool."

"Fool? Why fool?"

" 'Sdeath, I know not, why a man should be a fool; yet an the word displease thee, wherefore dost call thyself a fool?"

"I don't call myself a fool."

"Nay, 'tis so in sooth; old Morpheus can give thee proof on't."

"Yes? Well?"

"Tell me, is not a fool one who hath lost his wits?"

"So?"

"Why, then 'tis proved; for didst not say thou hadst lost thy wits?"

"Not I."

"Why, didst not say thou didst come down to this place? That's to call thyself a fool; for he who would lose his way o' purpose and wander out o' the world, hath surely lost his wits. Nay, thou'rt three fools, for thou dost play the fool, thou dost fool away thy time, and thou dost seek a fool's paradise. Wherefore I say unto thee: drink up, fool; drink up, sweet fool."

I stared sullenly at my glass. Morpheus burst out laughing.

"You should see yourself, Carl old jarl. You have a look of sublime irritation. You look like a petty functionary in the provincial branch of the civil service in a nineteenth-century Russian novel who after a drab day during which he's been subjected to insult and humiliation by a slightly less petty functionary for not wiping his pen-nibs comes home to his cramped quarters where he is addressed with cunning sarcasm by an insolent servant. Don't take it to heart, lad. Old Morpheus doth love to banter. Why, were I a mortal king, methinks I'd love only my mistress and my fool. Aye, there's something high in me needs the cutting down of a fool. Knifewit: the lancet for pustulous souls. Pride cometh before a fool. But tell me, lad, tell me. Whatever possessed you to make such a fool journey?"

I stood up. "All right, I'm a fool. Thanks for the wine. I'm going now."

"Easy does it, lad. Sit thee down, now, sit thee down. Come, let me fill thy cup. Old Morpheus bids thee be well. Aye, that's good. 'Sdeath, I like a man with a touch of hot blood in him. I'm a rolypoly dimpled dumpling of a sweethearted cherub myself, but pluck the wrong string in me—clip the wrong wing in me—why, man, it's the hotheaded archangel himself, and trouble in heaven. But away with these megrims! Please pass the Seagram's! Drink deep, for tomorrow thou shalt—aye. 'Tis a short span, lad. I'd not have thee go away angry."

"Nay, I'm not angry, Morpheus. Only a little tired. After all, it's been a long journey. Did I say nay? Hah! Did aye say nay? I can't help wondering what on earth I'm doing here, it's not like me at all. Though come to think of it, 'what on earth' does seem like the wrong expression, under the circumstances. I really ought to be getting back

fairly soon. I haven't even had my lunch! And yet for a long time I've had the feeling . . . It's peaceful here, talking like this. I can hear the sleepers out there, do you hear them?—of course they're only riffraff. Not from up there. Odd how right now I feel almost at home here whereas sometimes, up there . . . You're thinking I'm a little drunk. And yet, it's strange, but it's almost as if it was the most natural thing in the world, coming down here. There are times when I feel . . . You're thinking I'm a little drunk but the truth is I have hardly begun to drink. And I would like to take this opportunity Morpheus to thank you for this excellent wine and to say that in my opinion you are a fine fellow and a gentleman and a scholar and permit me to remark that you are a true lover of words and permit me to remark that if you can find it in your heart in your soul permit me to remark in short if you could pour me a little more just a bit there . . ."

"Why certainly. Easy does it. Steady there: that's the ticket."

I took a long swallow, spilling wine on my chin.

"And I think tomorrow I would like to go on that little tour you promised me. Though I wonder if 'tomorrow' is the right word, down here."

"Aye, all words are the right words, down here. Drink up, lad. And when thou hast drunk up—why then, drink down, my lad, drink down. Wine overflowing, night everlasting—talking and wrenching—thirst everquenching—heigh ho, it's a hard life.

Heigh, ho, this life is most jolly,
'Tis love hath made me so melancholy.
Cupid, you're nothin' but a two-time Chollie,
Sing heigh, ho, the heart o' the holly.

Heigh ho, lad, here's to all those who labor in the vineyards of the Lord."

"And to think it all started because I was looking for a baseball."

"Thou art like Saul, the son of Kish, who went forth to seek his father's asses, and found a kingdom."

"Morpheus, I'll tell you something. You really are a charming rogue."

"Indeed I am, lad. Indeed I am. A charming rogue. The phrase exactly. Heigh ho, here's to ambition. Hi ho. Ho hum. Bah. I'm sick of prose. I think I'll switch to verse.

I'm sick of prose. I'll therefore switch to verse
In hope of taking wing, as poets do.
Yet Icarus once took wing, which proved much worse
Than walking would have, with the ground in view.
My soul's on fire! I soar!—but what a curse

This rhyming is! Well then, a line or two,
And if I find I've trouble with my soaring,
Why then, good night, and back to yawns and snoring."

"Hey hey, Morpheus!" I cried, raising my mug in salute. "More! More!"

Morpheus placed his hand over his heart and lowered his eyes demurely.

"You'll turn my head, lad. I'm a shy slip of a thing, if the truth be told. I can scarce keep back a blush." He looked up eagerly. "'Sblood, methinks I'll turn novelist and enshrine me i' the Book o' the Month. A Muse! A Muse! My maidenhead for a Muse! 'Tis pity your modern prozers must needs go museless forth.

We novelists have no Muse, and that's a pity,
Since dedication to the Muse is fun.
I'd love a chance to be sublime, or witty,
And rattle off my themelets, one by one.
A poet is a fellow sitting pretty,
What with his Hails! and Sing in me's! — I'd run
Barefoot up Parnassus if old Clio
Or some such dame should deign to glance at me-o."

"Glance at me-o!" I cried. "Come on, Morpheus! Don't stop! More!"

Morpheus threw back his head and took a long drink. Dark wine spilled down his chin and the nearly empty bottle was vertical above his lips. He leaned forward, taking a deep breath, licking his lips.

"Joyce said the god of novelists is Thoth;
Proust saw an epic in a cup of tea.
Alas, t'embrace an ibis I'd be loth,
And instant coffee won't inspire me.
Sam Beckett fiddles to a muse of Sloth —
Old Nabby thinks the only Muse is he —
Ah me, I've none at all, and yet I need her.
Oh won't you be my Muse, dear gentle Reader?"

Looking off solemnly he intoned in a deep voice:

"Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the tale
Of Morpheus, god of dreams, and of that lad
Who one fine day set out beyond the pale
Of sun and shade, to see what might be had
Of 'ventures strange — here comes that rhyme — O hail,
Sweet rhyme! Good God. This rhyming drives me mad.

I'll never say a word against Lord Byron.
He churned out sixteen cantos without tirin'.

Besides, it's his — and therefore back to prose.
I'll walk with both my feet upon the ground.
And yet Lord knows my prose doth have its throes,
And makes my aching head spin round and round.
Perhaps the best of all is just to doze,
Dreaming of eras when I'll be renowned . . .
For life is but a snooze — a coffee break —
A little sleep, between a wake and a wake."

Clutching his winebottle in one hand and clenching his other hand into a fist, raising both hands to his shoulders, and slowly stretching his arms sideways, Morpheus hugely yawned.

"To Morpheus!" I cried, raising my winemug high. "A poet, i' faith!"

Morpheus dropped his hands heavily to the bed. "Nay, lad. Methinks 'tis a poor poet starts out all a-gallop and comes t' the finish leading his winded nag by the halter. 'Tis the common lot of your pot-poets; aye, and your pot-prosers too."

Morpheus yawned again, slowly stretching his arms sideways. At the end of his yawn he kept his arms outstretched, opened his free hand, and raised his head slightly: and lifting up his big, dark, melancholy eyes until he was gazing at the ceiling, he said solemnly: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden."

He yawned again and dropped his hands. Leaning back slowly, he slid down under the covers until his head rested on the plump pillow. He closed his eyes and lifted the bottle and held it upside down above his open mouth; a few drops trickled onto his lips. He placed the bottle carefully sideways on the bed beside his leg. "Consummatum est," he said. On the curtain across from me the giant shadow of his belly rose and fell slowly.

"Heigh ho," I said, "it's a hard life."

I slid down a little and leaned my head against my pillow.

"One thing, Morpheus. I know it's only your way. But I wish you wouldn't call me 'lad.' "

He lay with one hand over his chest and one hand flung out, the fingers upcurling.

"Good night, Morpheus," I said wearily, sliding down a little more and pressing my head into the soft pillow.

On the curtain across from me the shadow of his belly rose and fell, rose and fell: rose slowly and softly fell.

12. Waking

When I opened my eyes I saw a pale shepherd asleep on a hillside beneath a silver moon. Over him leaned a white lady in an azure mantle embellished with stars and planets. I turned my head and saw Morpheus sitting up in bed, holding before him a jagged fragment of mirror and turning his face from side to side with a frown. He glanced at me and said: "You look like the Austro-Hungarian Empire around nineteen seventeen," and returned to the mirror. "Ah," he said smiling, "you handsome devil, you." A white towel lay draped over his bare shoulder. On the bookshelf behind him two candles flamed and in the depression of the blanket formed by his spread knees stood a basin of dark soapy water. He began to lather his cheeks with a shaving brush and looking into the mirror he said: "Thus doth mortality outsleep the gods."

I sat up and glanced at my watch. It was a quarter past two. I did not know whether it was two in the afternoon or two in the morning. My lamp still burned on the bookshelf and beside me I saw a basin of water, a towel, and a piece of yellow soap. Inside the towel was a folded straight-razor. The water was cold and fresh. I slapped some on my cheeks and neck and then plunged my whole face in. When I lifted my dripping face I saw Morpheus lathering under his lifted chin. He glanced sideways at me and returned to his mirror. He sang:

"Farmer have you a daughter fair
Who can wash a soldier's underwear."

Still examining himself in the mirror he said: "Now let's get one thing straight, mate. We want no lazy good-for-nothing loafers in this outfit. I run a tight ship." Tipping his head to one side and puffing out his cheek, he began to draw a long razor slowly down his lathered cheek. He turned suddenly to me. "Are you awake?"

"I think so."

"Good. I was worried about you. Outsleeping Papa Morpheus himself. You seem to have a talent for it. I called your name twice and you didn't twitch an eyelash. Poor lad, thought I, snuffed out in his prime by a sip of wine."

He pointed with his lathered razor at a covered iron pot beside his knee. "'Tis a pot for pissing. But be a sweet lad and save thy dung. The gods bare their bottoms in Nature's privies."

I pulled the pot over, stood up unsteadily on the soft bed, and turned my back. When I removed the potcover a sharp salt smell of urine rose to my nostrils. I held the heavy pot at thigh-level and began splashing into it a dark-yellow stream.

"Go to it, lad! Oh aren't we the dainty dandy! It comes lively out, hide thee or not. Why, man, Niagara's but a dripping tap to thee. O now doth the mighty Mississippi seem naught but a runny nose. Yea, 'tis thou whom the wond'ring and amazed world will call Father of Waters. 'Sblood, 'tis Gitchee Gumee, the shining Big-Sea-Water. Zounds, an this flood continue, I'll build me an ark of gopher wood to lift me up above the drowned earth."

After a pause he said: "That strain again. It had a dying fall." Sadly he said: "Enough, no more. 'Tis not so sweet now as it was before."

I covered the pot, zipped myself up, and sat down against my chair. "I wish to announce, Morpheus, that I'm in an excellent mood. Even starvation seems barely troublesome."

"Why, I'm glad to hear it, lad. There's naught like pissing into a pot t'improve the disposition, stimulate the appetite, stir the natural spirits, and free the earthbound and flesh-encumbered soul for lofty — nnnh!" Morpheus dabbed at his cheek with the towel. "A plague of all talkers! Thus doth a god beprick himself, engend'ring blood." He lifted his head and sniffed the air loudly twice.

The curtains moved and an elderly woman appeared, bearing a tray that held covered dishes. She wore a plain gray dress and a white apron and stepped firmly forward across the slightly shaking bed.

"Good midnight, Pru. The lad's not dead, just dying." He flung out a hand. "Prudence, light of my life. Carl Hausman, a drunkard."

She curtsied lightly. "Pleased to meet you, sir. I hope you've had a pleasant nap."

"Nap is it! Dead to the world and snoring away like the man in the moon while honest folks are up and about their business. It's a disgrace. I rue the day I ever fell into his low company. What's the world coming to, I'd like to know."

"I'm sure I don't know, sir."

"Don't mind him," I said.

"I'm sure I don't, sir."

"What! Corrupting my servants! By Jove, sir, this has gone far enough."

She set down the tray beside Morpheus and lifted it, revealing a second tray beneath. She placed the laden tray beside the empty one, transferred several dishes, and carried the second tray over to me. She glanced at me as she set it down beside my leg. Straightening up she smoothed her hands on her apron and turned to Morpheus. "Is there anything else, sir?"

"No no, good Pru, 'tis all for now, sweet Pru."

"Very good, sir."

She turned and walked back surefootedly across the slightly shaking bed. Near the curtain division she turned and said: "One

thing, sir."

Morpheus looked up with raised eyebrows, his razor suspended in the air by his cheek.

"Just a thought, sir. I was wondering should I bring something more for the guest. He's skinny as a broom handle."

"Madam," said Morpheus, "you exceed the bounds of propriety."

She looked at Morpheus with a puzzled frown.

"Madam, when he first set eyes on you, he was so stricken with the tender passion, that e'er since he hath pined secretly away."

"Oh, sir," said Pru, smiling and blushing, "you will have your fun." She curtsied once again and was gone.

Morpheus shrugged. "For the matter o' that, why not, lad? Shriveled paps and a straight soul or a pair of bouncing boobies and a crooked heart. You pays yer money and you takes yer cherse."

On my tray was a pot of hot coffee, a pitcher of milk, a cup and saucer, a basket of rolls, pats of butter, and a plate containing buttered toast, fried eggs, and strips of bacon.

"My God!" I said. "You live like a king."

"Nay, lad, I live like a god. And now my sweet Lankshanks, Lord Lampwick, Knight of the Broom Handle, Sir Bedpost, Prince Table-leg, sweet my lord Chickenbone: fall to, tuck in, gobble it up, shovel it down—gulp and guzzle, lad—for we've a long and merry way to go 'twixt now and sweet sleep."

Urged by his words and my own sharp hunger I set about devouring everything that lay before me, while Morpheus returned to his lather; and it was not until I had finished and shaved, and sat back sipping a second cup of coffee and taking occasional puffs of a slender, rich-flavored cigar, that I thought to ask, pointing at the curtain across from me: "Who's that fellow on the curtain, Morpheus? He seems very peaceful, and I hope we didn't disturb his slumbers last night—though I shouldn't say 'last night' or 'this morning,' since here I sit in darkness and candlelight. It feels decidedly strange, let me tell you. I've just waked and breakfasted, and my body feels in a morning mood, yet outside it's black. Excuse me for talking so much, but I'm feeling very comfortable right now, and these cigars are excellent."

"Not at all, lad," said Morpheus, who was leaning back puffing on a black curve-necked pipe whose ebon shine caught the flame, "for what's man or god if he can't sit back with a good pipe of tobacco stuck in his teeth and exercise the sublime privilege of listening to himself jabber. That lad there"—he gestured with his pipe—"is Endymion, snoring away with all Latmus for a pillow—aye, and all heaven for a canopy. Thus doth mortality melt the cold heart o' the moon. See how the saucy wench doth hang about his neck, gazing lovesick into his sleep-drugged eyes, fumbling about him while he lies

a-dreaming, growing warm under her petticoat while he lies a-cold. Why, man, 'tis Biblical: the land of milk and honey beside the burning bush. But let him stir in's sleep—let one eye ope but a crack, I say—why, she'll draw back all Diana, cold as an arrow and tight as a bow. 'Tis always thus with your aging virgins, lad—ice in the eye and fire in the fork, till it's a wonder they don't melt away like an icicle in a chimney. Now that dreamer at the bedfoot—" He motioned with his pipe toward the foot of the bed.

"Oh, I recognize him, Morpheus—Rip van Winkle, isn't it? I know him by his rusty rifle. Aye. But that curtain there—what garden is it? And who are all those figures up above?"

" 'Tis the Earthly Paradise, lad, a sweet place to lie thee down i' the shade awhile. There 'tis always spring, and the fruit's forever ripe on every tree. The heavy boughs bend down to the hungry mouth, and lovesick zephyrs caress thy throat, reaching playful fingers into thy shirt. There the lion lies down wi' the lamb, and Venus lies her down wi' the god o' fire under the shade of a greenwood tree. But up above, lad, up above—why, look thee, the Sistine Chapel's but a painted egg to the canopy of Morpheus. 'Sblood, 'tis a very firmament of dreamers. See how they lie all atumble yet each latched to each in wheel on wheel of dreaming—ten thousand dreamers wheeling about the god of all dreams and dreamers. For look thee, Carl, that lively devil in the center there, dressed in a black robe, snoring away with his hands crossed o'er his belly—is't not the living image of sweet Morpheus himself? See how the dreamers wheel round him, lad! 'Tis impossible to name the tenth part o' the pack of 'em. Look thee, that dreamer wi' the red beard, shut up i' the hill, a-lying wi's head upon the table—'tis Barbarossa, lad, snoring away his time i' the Kyffhäuser. See how his beard doth grow through the marble table and wind itself round the table-leg, while outside the ravens fly round. And that handsome king, asleep on the riverbarge where the three crowned lasses ride—why, 'tis Arthur himself, a-sailing to the green shores of Avalon, where he'll sleep awhile till England calls him home. See there, seven lads i' the hill, 'tis the Seven Sleepers, and peeping up behind, why, 'tis a fair youth a-dreaming o'er his image in a pool. That gray-eyed lad, lying abed in's wide-sleeved dressing gown, gazing up dreamily at walls and ceiling—dost know him, lad? See the wide, soft slippers by his bed. 'Tis none but Oblomov, that sweet dreamer. And look there, that lad lying wrapped in a blanket 'twixt the frosted panes of a loggia. The book hath fall'n from his hands and he gazes off wi's eyes half-closed. Know'st thou not Hans Castorp? Behind him a pale knight-at-arms lies dreaming in an elfin grot—ah, la belle dame sans merci hath him in thrall—while in a hushed chamber Madeline still sleeps her azure-lidded sleep. O'er the dark thornwood, behold the tow'r of

Dornröschen the sleepy-eyed, her whom I'd fain call La Belle au bois dormant; aye, for e'en the thornwood lies a-dreaming. And see there, 'tis she of the Idle Lake, Phaedria the fair, lulling a knight softly asleep with a love lay on her leafy isle. Look thee, that lad standing in a bucket on a stick—'tis Ishmael the dreamy-eyed, aloft in his crow's nest, dreaming o' the deep, blue, bottomless soul of nature, aye, and ready to fall with a splash into the lap of all eternity. Dost see Clara dreaming of her nutcracker prince? And Laura in her glass menagerie? And there, lad, see, 'tis Marco walking on Mulberry Street. And there where the rockrye springs and the whangdoodle sings: a hobo lays him down i' the shade of a cigarette tree. There's Prospero on his isle, and there's Pharaoh dreaming of seven lean kine. Behind him a drowsing faun perpetuates his nymphs and nymphos in the heat o' the day, while a knight runs full tilt at a windmill, and off to one side the dormouse rises sleepily from his teapot, and Jasper lies a-dreaming in his watermelon patch. Ah, see 'em all, lad, see 'em all! There's H. C. Earwicker, Little Nemo, Emma Bovary, Epimenides, Brunnhilde, Dorothy of Kansas, Gregor Samsa, the Lady of Shalott, the Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland, Lazy Mary, Piers Plowman, J. Alfred Prufrock, Hasheesh Nell and the Poppy Face Kid, Heinrich von Ofterdingen, Little Boy Blue, Miniver Cheevy, Beautiful Dreamer, El Desdichado, Goldilocks, the Red King, Scipio Africanus, Sleepy the Dwarf, Hamlet, Ferdinand the Bull, and Sigmund Freud. Dreamers all, lad, wheel on wheel of 'em, droop-eyed angels in ho-hum heaven, a garland of yawners, a dance of drowzers, a sarabande of snorers in the Morphic mode. Is't not a sight to sweeten the eye?"

I lay back admiring through slowfloating transparencies of blue smoke the darkly colored canopy of Morpheus, which as he talked had burst into a multiplicity of dreamers, becoming crowded with particulars, lush with precision, seeming to draw closer as it broke apart into new richness of detail, pullulating and breeding, spreading and spilling, all-space-filling, rushing away in every direction.

"A plague on idleness!" cried Morpheus. Flinging aside the covers he rose slowly in baggy boxer shorts and tied a long black dressing gown around his plump belly. He looked down and rubbed his jellybelly up and down with a hand. "Zounds, lad, fasting will be my ruin. Canst see me still? 'Tis love wastes me thus. I droop; I languish; I'm like to pine away for very grief. 'Tis all for jealousy o' my mistress's glove."

He frowned down at the wrinkled black spread and began tramping about, rattling the dishes on the trays. Suddenly he bent over and, straightening, lifted up between thumb and forefinger a black wrinkled sock that he stared at with his head bent to one side. " 'Tis not so fresh as a daffadowndilly, nor so sweet as a dish of skim milk,

nor yet so pure as the bosom of a blushing maid, nor so soft as the belly of a plump-rumped wench; but 'twill serve." He draped the sock over his shoulder and continued tramping about, smoothing the covers with his hairy toes, kicking at overlapping folds. He lifted a portion of spread slowly with clenched toes, forming a tightening hillock of black velvet, down whose sides tumbled a stub of candle and a broken pencil; when he released it the black velvet fluttered down in a sagging wrinkled mass. "Ah," he said a moment later, and picked up a second black sock. He inserted his hand and wrist into the opening of the sock and slowly through the toe emerged his forefinger. He stared at it gravely and wiggled it twice. Looking at me he said sadly: " 'Tis a symbol of virtue hardpressed in an evil world." He sighed, sat down heavily, and pulled on his socks, crossing each calf in turn over the outstretched thigh of the other leg. Still sitting, he rummaged about in the covers and picked up two soft black slippers with a collapsed look about them. One had a hole in the side from which gray threads sprouted and the other had a torn seam in back. Morpheus stood up, thrust his feet into his slippers, grasped the lapels of his gown as if he were posing for a picture, and removing the pipe from his mouth he pointed the stem at me and said: "Up, thou laggard, thou sluggard, thou lean bonebag, thou droop-arse, thou un-greased skewer, thou fleshless wonder! Up, up, I say! 'Tis out into the night with Papa Morpheus!"

"Why, certainly," I said, picking up my shoes and rising, "thou Heidelberg tun, thou Moby Dick, thou thou thou Unabridged Dictionary —"

Morpheus burst out laughing. "That's the spirit, lad! 'Tis only shyness makes thy speech walk on tiptoe, all a-tremble lest it should be noticed. Why, 'tis like a maid taking little mincing steps for fear she might bounce behind. Let thy speech be black-eyed Susan, who'll tumble i' the hay and laugh after. As thus: why, thou bloated udder, thou stinking lard-lump, thou flesh-puddle, thou oozing bag of grease, thou unnatural Atlas who doth carry the whole world in thy belly and thy belly in thine arse . . ."

"I'm not sure I agree with your theory, Morpheus, because in my opinion —"

"A plague on opinions! What a devil have I to do with opinions! I like not opinions. Canst thou eat an opinion? Then hath thy opinion not the worth of an onion. Nay, stick thy opinion in thy pocket, if 'twill bear the weight of it. Faugh, see how the lad frowns a black stormcloud at me and darts thunderbolts with his looks. Nay, be not angry, lad. Morpheus, sweet Morpheus, most sweet and yet sweeter than most sweet and smilingest and most jolly-amical Morpheus, frets to go. Come, enjoy me, lad, for I'm in a Morphean humor."

He strode to the Earthly Paradise and flung aside the curtains,
beckoning to me with a jerk of his head.

OceanofPDF.com

II. The Tale of Ignotus



1. Portrait of a Young Man

I found myself in a high room that seemed a darkened picture gallery and yet at the same time had the air of a dimly lit lobby in an old hotel. The four walls were thickly hung with paintings of many sizes, and the room was filled with faded armchairs, plump couches, and small mahogany tables upon which oil lamps dimly glowed. In each wall was an open doorway through which other rooms were darkly visible. Men and women in old-fashioned costumes sat smoking and talking listlessly, or strolled to and fro idly on the ash-charred rug. Several people turned to stare at us mistrustfully as we entered. The only illumination came from the dim lamps on the tables. The shadowy and smoke-filled lamplight was so unsuitable for the display of paintings that it appeared almost to discourage attention: and indeed the pictures in their heavy frames seemed to have withdrawn into the shadows, as if to avoid too close a scrutiny.

Morpheus began strolling along one wall with his cigar in his teeth and his thumbs tucked under the lapels of his robe. Thrumming his thick fingers on his chest, and exhaling bluish plumes of smoke, he stopped for a few moments before each painting in turn. The dark and glimmering paintings were all by different hands and showed a variety of familiar subjects in a conventional realistic mode: a village dance, a frowning man on a horse, a woman with a white poodle, cardplayers in a tavern. Many showed detailed interiors without people, or landscapes with riddling traces of the human: a picnic basket under an oak tree, a yellow haystack beside which lay a pair of long pink gloves, a field of poppies stretching beyond a rude wooden fence upon which hung a gleaming cane. The pictures were carefully finished but seemed to me without distinction, and the air of scrupulous mediocrity was increased by the thick, varnished, elaborately carved frames, cluttered with wooden leaves, wooden shepherdesses, and wooden bunches of grapes.

Unperturbed, Morpheus continued his enigmatic stroll, stopping a little longer before certain paintings to remark "Ah, exquisite!" or "I

faint with beauty," while pressing his hand to his heart and rolling up his eyes. His posturings embarrassed me and seemed to irritate the people in the room, several of whom rose from their seats and moved farther away. Morpheus finished one wall and began along another, and I was beginning to feel a certain irritation myself when to my surprise he paused before a painting and appeared to study it with close attention.

A small copper plaque affixed to the base of the frame read portrait of A young man. The gloomy painting showed a handsome youth of about twenty-five, lying asleep on a bed in a garret. On the floor beside a fallen candlestub lay a curled and slightly torn pawnbroker's ticket. The young man wore a dark-blue frockcoat, a white waistcoat, and a pair of pale-yellow breeches above tight white stockings. On a rude chair lay a crumpled neckcloth and a polished walking-stick. He lay on his back with his face turned three-quarters to the viewer. His dark auburn hair fell in thick clusters on his pale forehead, which was tensed slightly, as if his sleep were troubled. Though closed, his eyes had a darkly brooding quality, suggested perhaps by the contraction of the brows and by the two deeply marked vertical lines in the space between. His nose was strong and finely chiseled, his mouth scornful and sensual, with a trace of melancholy at the corners. It was the face above all that was remarkable in the otherwise mediocre painting, for the artist had somehow managed to imbue the features with a dark and noble sorrow, and to suggest beneath the childlike smoothness of the flesh a great range of intense feeling, such as disdain, brooding loneliness, flaring anger, and secret suffering. The exaggerated romanticism of the painting, with its facile notion of male beauty, its melodramatic emphasis upon the dark and dismal, and its shrill contrast between the noble and the shabby, irritated my nerves in the manner of a lush insistent melody, yet despite myself I felt drawn to the portrait, which seemed to possess a power that compelled my deepest attention.

When I turned to Morpheus I was startled to see him looking at the picture with a gentle and indulgent smile.

"I see it amuses you," I began sharply, at once dropping my voice to nearly a whisper, and glancing about nervously as several people turned to look, "and I won't deny there's something sentimental and second-rate in the artist's conception of noble suffering."

Morpheus said nothing, but only raised an eyebrow, as if to discount in advance whatever I might say.

"Yes," I continued as quietly as I could, "and I'll even go further and tell you what I was thinking a second ago. I was thinking that the very idea of suffering has about it a touch of boastfulness — of irritating self-display — of emotion a little too pleased with itself — not to mention

an air of special pleading. It's as if the artist is saying: all right, folks, I've done my job, I've given you plenty of misery and misfortune—now be stirred to the depths. It's a secret conspiracy—and the picture is in on the deal. Yes, there's something just a little too self-knowing about poor old dreary old Suffering, something that makes you want to resist her, even to mock her—aye, Morpheus, e'en now dost thou mock at me, for-why I want words whereby to show forth my meaning. But no matter what can be said against the painting, don't you feel—oh, forget it. But don't you feel that within the embarrassing limits of his conception the artist has poured himself into his idea and filled it with life and somehow redeemed it? Yes! And redeemed it not because of a sudden departure from triteness, a daring originality, but precisely because the mediocrity itself has been magically filled with a mysterious life. And isn't it strange that people talk that way—praising art by saying it has life? You just stand there looking so amused! But I tell you, it's right there—right there—in the difference between trite images which are boring and the same images which set your brain on fire—it's right there that you find yourself in the presence of the mystery of art."

For some reason I had grown excited as I spoke, raising my voice and throwing my arms about, perhaps because Morpheus continued to wear an expression of benevolent amusement; and I felt with self-anger that my words were in excess of the occasion, as if I were defending not the painting before me, but the suffering youth himself.

"Why, lad, thou dost wax romantical wi' thy magic and thy mystery; and I much fear me, lest my loose company hath unsettled thy university brains. But heat not thy blood o'ermuch in perfervid commendation o' dullness, for this painting pleaseth me well. *Portrait of a Young Man*—why, 'tis a rascal after mine own heart, for look how he doth snore away his time unto all eternity. Yet methinks 'tis not a gentle slumber."

Standing with his hands behind his back and his cigar stuck in his teeth, Morpheus leaned forward until his face was quite close to the canvas, as if to examine the portrait minutely. Removing the cigar, and leaning still closer, he released a sudden mouthful of smoke directly upon the face of the sleeping youth, entirely obscuring his features.

I was as shocked as if Morpheus had blown smoke into my own face. I glared fiercely at him, but ignoring me he straightened up and continued to gaze as if fondly at the painting. I said nothing but watched in anger as the insulting cloud cleared slowly away. As it did so I sensed a change in the picture, as if it had been harmed in some way. Beneath the thinning vapors the suffering youth lay on his bed as before, and only gradually did I become aware that one eye was open. He appeared to be looking directly at me. The young man sat up

abruptly, made a waving motion with one hand, and stared angrily out. Then swinging his legs over the side of the bed he stood up, pulled down his coat, ran his fingers through his hair; and glancing contemptuously about his chamber, he strode forward and began to step out of the picture.

Morpheus moved to one side and I to the other; and as the little figure emerged from the painting he seemed to expand in the manner of smoke, so that a moment later a full-sized man stood on the floor before us, glaring disdainfully at Morpheus and saying not a word.

Morpheus burst into laughter. " 'Sdeath, Tom, fix not sweet Morpheus wi' thy mad Byronical eye, but have a swallow, man, have a swallow."

"No man," said the figure beside me, in an accent of bitterness.

Morpheus, who had plucked a half-filled winebottle from his robe, burst into louder laughter. "Why, then art thou a god. But drink up, Noman, and cease these peacock posturings, lest thou affright my friend and send him quaking home."

Morpheus worked the cork free and held out the bottle to the somber figure beside me, who stood motionless with his proud head drawn back. Though his skin was of an almost feminine smoothness and whiteness he was deep-chested and strong-shouldered and had about him a powerful, commanding air. Pulling his shoulders back, as if he were preparing to fight, he suddenly seized the bottle, threw back his head, and took a deep swallow.

"Aye, Noman, 'tis well. But tell us, how goes it i' the oily world? Carl Hausman, a wanderer. Lord Hall."

Lowering the bottle, Lord Hall turned upon me a cold, mistrustful gaze. "You perceive justly that I am of a moody and mistrustful nature. The ludicrous solemnity of my bearing is an accurst inheritance of the two-dimensional world. Pray rest assured that I intend you no insult."

"Not at all," I replied warmly, stirred by the solemn dignity of his words, by his noble bearing, and by his sullen and strangely commanding face.

"Shall we go?" he said abruptly, surveying the room with disdain. Without waiting for a reply he strode along the wall, casting contemptuous glances here and there. As he stepped away I glanced at the painting. It remained undamaged by his absence, and revealed no change except that the coarse coverlet showed a slight depression where he had lain. But hurrying after Morpheus and Lord Hall, I joined them as they were turning into a small alcove I had not noticed before. The room was unoccupied and was supplied with several soft armchairs, a couch, and a small table upon which burned an oil lamp. On the walls hung several pictures showing interiors empty of people.

Morpheus chose the couch and lay down on his back, resting his head upon a coucharm, crossing his ankles, and holding the bottle upright on his stomach. The two armchairs faced the couch and were partially turned toward each other. I waited for Lord Hall to choose, but when he remained standing I sat in the chair by Morpheus' feet. The bottle on his belly rose and fell gently as he breathed.

Lord Hall stood somberly apart, looking as if at any moment he would turn and stride angrily from the room. Suddenly he glanced down at Morpheus. "Since I'm half choked to death with your damnable weed I shouldn't mind finishing the job if you've another."

Morpheus laughed gaily and, reaching into a pocket, tossed him a cigar. "'Sdeath, I love thy sweet temper and sugared ways. Come, be not melancholical, 'tis a life like another."

"'Tis a life like no other—damn your Elizabethan." He strode fiercely to the small table and, snatching up the oil lamp as if it were a weapon, lit his cigar.

"Aye, 'tis an idiom most affected and unnatural. These romantical devils do loathe all artifice, lad. Aye, they be great lovers o' Nature, wi' their lyrical ballocks.

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings:
Our meddling intellect—"

"Damn Nature," said Lord Hall, thrusting down the lamp loudly.

Morpheus burst out laughing. "Why, so I do, Tom, so I do; and Nature damn'd, and Art derided, what's left but laughter under the giddy moon?"

Lord Hall stood glowering beside his chair. All at once he turned and threw himself almost violently into it. He sat in brooding silence, as if he had forgotten us. Suddenly he sprang up and began pacing restlessly about. "And yet," he said, "I have known such moments—" He stopped abruptly and turned to me. "Pray excuse my lamentable display of temper." I was groping for a reply when turning swiftly he said to Morpheus: "Mock on, fiend!" Suddenly striding over to where Morpheus lay he grasped his hand and cried: "Ah, but you know it does my wretched heart good to see you, my friend."

"Aye, and my heart warms to thee, Tom. But come, here's wine, and tobacco, and a lad would hear thy tale, an he be not plagued to death by thy fantastical posturings."

A dangerous flush rose to Hall's cheek, but making a visible effort to suppress his anger he returned to his chair, bearing with him his cigar and a bottle of wine.

"I don't know why it is," he said to me, "but I permit that infernal mocker to speak to me in a manner I would not brook from any other devil in creation."

“ ‘Tis forwhy thou know’st, though I do mock at thee, yet do I love thee well. Aye, man—and man I’ll call thee, whilst thou’rt out thy oily jail—I do remember me, how I did keep pace wi’ thee, what time thou didst think to tire me wi’ thy carousing; and did sit up singing whilst thou didst fall into the deep disgrace of sleep.”

“Aye, you old rascal, you have the energy of half a regiment.”

“ ‘Tis abstemious living doth keep me fiery young. Thou’rt silent, lad.”

This last remark was addressed to me, with distinct impatience. Inwardly cursing my shyness, and feeling that I had somehow disappointed Morpheus, I said quickly: “It’s only that I’ve never talked to—to a—do you consider yourself a portrait?” Shocked at the stupidity of my question, and raging at Morpheus for having forced me prematurely into speech, I stared at the floor, feeling my cheeks aflame.

“I consider myself the most unfortunate wretch ever cursed with sentience.”

Morpheus blew a large and slowly turning smoke ring. He tapped his ash carefully onto a corner of the couch: and loudly, wearily, he sighed.

“Aye, ‘tis sentience doth make wretches of us all. O happy rocks, and thrice-blessed clouds, who know not the torments of unceasing thought! And you, dear joyous turnips, who do shame us wi’ your natural cheer! Man, poor man, doth languish in envy o’ thy brainless lot, longing for naught save to be an unthinking sod. Is’t not so, my melancholical hyperbolical Tom?”

“By God, Morpheus, do not provoke me further, or I swear by twenty thousand devils I’ll not endure it.”

“ ‘Sblood, I care not a straw for thy twenty thousand devils, nor for twenty thousand angels neither. ‘Tis thou dost provoke me, wi’ thy romantical prattle.”

“By Christ I’ll hear no more of this.”

Lord Hall sprang to his feet and looked as if he would throw himself upon Morpheus, who sat up eagerly and, pushing up his robe-sleeve above his powerful forearm, cried: “Aye, an thou’lt fight, thou whelp, I’ll teach thee to respect thy betters!”

I rose quickly and raising a hand said: “Just a moment, gentlemen.” Morpheus looked fiercely at me, and Lord Hall, whose fists were clenched, turned his flushed face to me with an expression of angry surprise.

“Now listen,” I continued, looking impatiently from one to the other. “This argument began because of my idiotic question, so I’ll consider myself to blame if you bash each other’s heads in—though for God’s sake, Morpheus, you’re really overdoing the Morphean

mockery, and I wish for once you'd lay off it. Can't you see he's got something on his mind? And you, sir: pray rest assured that it's only his way. You really shouldn't let him get your goat so easily—if my meaning is clear, Lord Hall. If you know him, you know he certainly doesn't mean any harm by it at all. Pray permit me to assure you that the way he taunts you is absolute child's play compared to the way he goes after me. All he's really doing—aside from playing with your hot temper, sir—is refusing to permit you to call yourself the most wretched person—or creature—or whatever you want to call it—in existence. He by no means asserts that you aren't miserable, only that you're not the most miserable creature alive. And if you object to the word 'alive,' I apologize, but you seem very much alive to me at the moment, sir. But pray permit me to ask, Lord Hall: is any of this worth fighting about? Is it worth ruining a friendship for? Surely there is only one answer: a resounding No. It's obvious to me that you, Morpheus, and you, Lord Hall, are fond of each other, and speaking as one who is neither portrait nor god, but somewhere between the two, and therefore by nature suited to be a mediator, I urge you as strongly as I can to settle your differences in a civilized manner. But if you can't do it—if you insist on fighting—well, I for one am not going to stand here and witness the depressing spectacle of two intelligent souls descending to the worst sort of human brutality. I hate this kind of thing when it happens up there, and I'm disappointed—yes, deeply disappointed—to see it happening down here. That's all I have to say about the matter, gentlemen."

This startling speech took me entirely by surprise; and as if my name were Lord Hausman I stood looking fiercely from one to the other, my head thrown back and my eyes flashing fire.

"Sdeath," said Morpheus, tapping his ash onto the floor, "I do hate preaching worse than prunes."

With an angry shrug—an impatient and disdainful jerk of the shoulders—I turned to leave. At the same moment Lord Hall stepped in front of me and grasping me by the hand cried: "It was a manly speech and shamed me. Come, here's my hand. I've a devil of a temper—but the devil's fled. And minding your own advice, don't leave us in a huff—but recall that Morpheus is a damnable rogue—and a drunken old dog—and the only friend an accursed outcast ever had—and as merry a devil as ever mocked at paradise. What—quiz me, will you—quiz me—you old rascal. You are a pretty fellow to talk about peacocks."

"Zounds, an these be praises, I'd liefer be cursed by Satan himself than lauded by the likes o' thee. But come, lads, sit ye down, and rest your weary bones awhile. Gentle Morpheus, peaceloving Morpheus, bids you be well."

Lord Hall's handclasp was so warm, and Morpheus' good spirits so genuine, that my anger vanished at once; and sitting down in my chair I caught a sudden cigar that Morpheus tossed to me. Lord Hall remained standing while I lit up, and when I raised my eyes I saw him staring at me with an expression I could not fathom. He was looking at me with a kind of troubled fascination; and as my eyes met his he said: "It has been a long time since I stood so near to—one of your kind." These last words were uttered with an edge of hatred, and as if he had caught himself he added with sudden gaiety: "Ah, but what of that? The universe is full of wonders—and horrors—and the maker in his infinite wisdom—and sublime goodness—has seen fit—to supply us with tobacco and wine." With this he threw himself into his chair and raising his bottle first to me and then to Morpheus, flung back his head for a long swallow. Something in all this disturbed me and I said: "You say 'one of your kind' as if I were a member of an alien race. And yet you yourself appear so much to be one of my kind that I have to make an effort to recall that a short while ago you were—you were—"

"A daub of paint," said Morpheus. Lord Hall looked as if he had been lashed across the cheek. Quickly I said: "Is the transition painful?"

"No more painful," said Hall, visibly controlling himself, "than the change you feel from sleep to waking. No, it's not that—it's the ease of forgetting—and the impossibility of forgetting. It's to be caught between two worlds—to be neither one thing nor another—to be cut off—homeless—cursed like Cain—weary—and forever wandering. And worst of all—not the black secret—but the obscene hope—springing eternal in the blighted breast—like a flower of madness."

His despairing words entered me like fire. I glanced sharply at Morpheus during this speech, and as if yielding to my silent plea he lay with closed eyes in a parody of drunken sleep, one hand hanging heavily by a bottle on the floor. Turning to Hall, who sat staring moodily before him, I said quietly: "What you say has touched something in me, Lord Hall. You see, I too—well, but it's hard to say, exactly. But I too have felt—the way you put it—cut off—homeless—or say, standing a little to one side of life—as if it were taking place just out of reach—just over there, beyond me. I suppose that sounds strange to you. It even sounds strange to me. But perhaps that's why I've come down to this place, though at the time I thought I was only wandering a little out of my way. And yet—if I may ask—though you say you're alone—am I mistaken in believing that you aren't the only one—of your kind?"

He looked up darkly. "I detest—from the bottom of my soul—the accursèd confraternity."

There seemed nothing more to say after that, and I hesitated to ask

him to speak about himself when he was in so black a mood. I was therefore surprised when after a short pause he asked in a distinctly genial tone: "But have you never run into one of us before?"

"Never. I come from up there, remember." I jerked my thumb at the ceiling.

He held up the bottle and said, with a graceful nod: "The very scene of my botched birth."

"But surely not every painting—"

"Not one in ten thousand—not one in ten million. And yet—we are everywhere. You have heard of a *lusus naturae*—a sport of nature? We are a *lusus artis*—a sport of art. We represent—in the realm of paint—what a three-breasted woman represents—in the realm of flesh. Nature is doubtless extremely bored when she produces such women for her amusement. Art too is perhaps bored with herself and so plays little pranks to keep from falling asleep. Art and Nature—two old bitches. One with false teeth and a *chignon flottant*—the other all gums and bald. Aye, grin, Morpheus—look at him—the seraphic devil—out of it all. Among your kind—if I be not mistaken—there is an alien race—sprung from your own loins—yet forever set apart—and none can tell what lovely blushing bride—shall give birth to one of these despised and wretched creatures. You raise your eyebrows, do you? I refer to nothing more than the race of dwarves. So it is with us. Here and there—among the myriad paintings moldering in museums before the stares of blackguards and blockheads—or freshly finished on the easel—a forbidden creature is born. Never is this discussed among you—in no book is it written—though hints be scattered everywhere. Yet—among our kind—it is a source of ceaseless enquiry.

"I have studied the matter—wearying my eyes—and wasting my brains—for more black hours than I care to remember. There is a theory—attractive to superficial souls—which states that the mystery is mechanical. Old paintings—rotting away in damp, hot attics—or hanging for untold ages on the walls of decaying provincial museums—are said to be peculiarly subject to chemical change. It is, in fact, nothing less than the notion of spontaneous generation—applied to figures in oils. The precise combination of temperature—and light—and degree of decay—is said to bring about the happy change—as flame springs from discarded rags—or as in the philosophy of Anaximander—living creatures are generated from the primordial slime—by the heat of the sun. It is a pretty theory, and utterly fails to explain how it is that of two paintings hanging side by side in a museum—sharing the same history—and painted by the same artist—one is but a patch of color on canvas—and the other—one of the damned.

"At one time—best forgotten—I wrestled with this problem—till

one night I saw in a flash—that the flaw in the mechanistic explanation lies in its failure to consider the artist. He it is who brought the painting into existence—and he it is who must bring the living creature into existence. What is a painting? A daub of color—and a dash of soul. Even among your ordinary paintings—and I’ve studied ‘em till I’m sick to death of all daubers and wish every museum sunk to the bottom of the ocean—there are differences. Take two portraits of equal technical accomplishment—how does it happen that one is all smooth paint—while the other shows a particular turn of the neck—or flash of the eye—that seems a living thing? You’ll not account for it, though you crack your brains over a library of dusty critics. No, it’s the painter dreaming himself into the work—breathing into it the life of his spirit. In certain paintings this energy—or concentration—or spiritual in-dreaming—call it what you like—and devil take it—occurs with a strange intensity—a rare completeness. To revert to the language of the mechanists—you may say that spiritual particles—atoms of the soul—are emitted from the enflamed imagination—and enter the paint. There they may lie dormant for centuries—or for a day.

“But a time comes—when the matter sickened and infected by potent germs of spirit—begins to be conscious. So it must have been when Nature—that great daub of paint—first began to writhe with consciousness. And though it’s but a theory—it accounts for instances of a strange and upsetting kind.

“It is known—even among your kind—though hidden away in despised and neglected volumes—that there are portraits who move their eyes. This common occurrence is nothing but an instance of incomplete emergence. Stranger cases have been recorded. There are portraits who can move a single arm—though still within the paint. There are blushing portraits—talking portraits—portraits that move freely though still within the two-dimensional realm. Cases have been recorded—in which the portrait emerges from the frame—but as a phantom—a substanceless ghost—as happens most commonly when only the head has been painted—the shabby artist evidently having failed to imagine the rest of the body. Such floating heads are disturbing even to us—who are as much flesh and blood as you—save for our unspeakable origin. Partial emergence is not unknown. In such an instance, part of the body—most frequently the arms—emerges from the canvas—to the horror of all unfortunate enough to witness it—and to the far greater horror of the trapped and struggling wretch within. Consider the case of Hilde Wertsheim—who in Lützen in the year 1433—was seized by such a painting—and held in a lover’s embrace that ended only with her death.

“So at least one gathers—from the scanty evidence. The evidence!

Mere bits and scraps, in the writings of your realm—and half of it unreliable. So great has been the effort at suppression—that the uncomfortable truth emerges most often in disguise—in folk tales—in popular superstition—in novels of a dubious and disgusting kind. It's what we call the Secret Tradition—those tales of mysterious portraits—taken seriously by none save driveling idiots—yet sprouting here and there in your hallowed literature—like so many gargoyles in the corners of a cathedral. But to my theme.

“All the occurrences of which I speak—those cases of incomplete freedom—may be explained as due to a certain lack of spiritual intensity—an incompleteness of imagination—on the part of the creator. But when the soul of the imaginer pours intensely and completely into the work of his hands—ah, then the terrible seed is sown—from which a living creature—neither man nor phantom—will one day hideously spring forth.”

At these words he sprang from his chair and began pacing rapidly about in evident agitation of spirit; but soon mastering himself he returned to his seat where, composing himself with a long drink from the winebottle, and glancing at slumbering Morpheus, he quietly continued.

2. Birth and Flight

“I remember my first sensation distinctly—our kind do. It was that of warmth. This was succeeded by a sensation of cold—or more precisely—by the slow withdrawal of warmth. These two sensations—each lasting a fair space of time—began to alternate regularly—the one passing gradually into the other. In time the warmth and its withdrawal became associated in my consciousness with light and dark—although at this stage of my pestilential development I had no other visual sensations—for reasons which shall I trust become clear.

“It is less clear when I first became aware of sounds. But from the beginning I was able to distinguish certain sounds from all the others—for they bore with them meanings that I understood—though my inexperience of the outer world prevented me from understanding all of them. I heard the coming and going of many voices, and one voice that remained the same. This voice sometimes spoke when it was alone—and from it I learned—in the shadowy way of half-understanding—that he was wretchedly poor—and sick to death of giving people what they wanted—instead of what he saw. I did not know by half what it meant—yet I understood well enough that it was a bitter voice. Often he complained of wasting himself in idiotic tasks—and always I heard the sound of footsteps—and scrapings—and soft slapping sounds.

"My ability to comprehend human speech surprises you, does it? Please to recollect that I had been created in the flower—and very glower—of young manhood. For we have three histories, we accursed ones. One is the history of our awakening in the paint—one is the history of our life beyond the painting—and one is the history imagined for us by the painter—the history we carry with us from the painted world into the outer world—often a poor patch of history—a botched job—with vexatious gaps—and diabolical abysses. Well then: I understood human speech. I was still fixed in the paint. I had a sense of beyondness—that place whence the sounds came—but only in this rudimentary fashion did I distinguish between the two worlds. I was in the canvas—motionless—entirely conscious—and aware of neither strangeness nor constraint—though curious about the world beyond—and the voice that remained the same. But at this point my evolution took a swift leap forward.

"For all at once—with the force of a terrific explosion—the light became intensely bright. I was able to distinguish stationary shapes—and a shape that moved about. My attention was seized by a space or hole—which appeared brighter than other objects—glowing like a jewel—a wretched simile—for I knew not at all what a jewel might be—and—and—the devil—curse catch me if I know how to convey the pleasure I took—in my first sight of what I later came to know as a window.

"So was it with all the objects that greeted my newly awakened gaze. I looked eagerly upon them—hungrily upon them—without understanding what they were. From the moment of my newborn sight I yearned to enter the world. It is said that certain of your kind—standing before a painting—have longed to enter the painted world. So in reverse it was with me. I felt no pain—save the pain of longing—and a vague sensation of entrapment. I was still in the paint—was still myself mere paint—mere matter—yet I was matter grown conscious of itself. The moving shape was but partly visible to me from where I lay. He was engaged in what I dimly understood to be the application of color to a whitish rectangle—by means of a thin rod held in one hand. Often he would step back and gaze at his work with his head bent to one side. Once he grew angry—and threw aside the colored board—only to take up another. The bright space slowly darkened. The shape went away. After a while he returned and made in the dark two small trembling points of light. He appeared to be changed—moving about in a clumsy way. He fell—rose—moved out of my purview—lurched into sight. It was at this moment that a little incident took place—which first made me aware of my—shall I call it my difference?

"For he caught my eye. He seemed to turn to stone. From that moment I date the death of my innocence—the loss of my spiritual

virginity. A terrible presentiment entered me—like a burning stick thrust into my brain—for I saw and half understood—his look of horror. He shook his head—lurched closer—and though instinctively I closed my eyes—yet I could sense him staring at me—could feel his vile breath against me—and smell his drunken odor. After a time he stumbled away. I heard him fall onto what I knew to be his bed—for it resembled mine. In the midst of my fear I clearly realized two things: that something was amiss with me—and that in the era of light and dark I had lain with closed eyes.

“All that night I kept fearful watch while he lay sleeping. Slowly a gray light appeared. At the first sign of his stirring I closed my eyes. I heard him sit up—his heels struck the floor heavily—then silence. All at once I heard his steps coming towards me—and felt his breath hot upon me. He laughed aloud—called himself a fool—uttered a mighty oath against beer—and returned to his work. All the long day I spied upon him anxiously from my corner. He too appeared to be ill at ease—turning often to look at me—but I was quick to shut my eyes. I felt obscurely threatened by him, and was impatient for him to be gone. So passed an atrocious day.

“That night I emerged from the paint. It was no more mysterious—no less mysterious—than that. One moment I was paint—the next I was flesh and blood. I stood on the floor—in that moonlit garret—a young man of dubious extraction and uncertain means. I touched my face with my hands. I looked about. An instinct bade me to be off. At the same time I yearned to touch things—to feel my new universe spring into my fingers. I looked over my shoulder at the abandoned portrait—on the floor of the painting I saw a scrap of paper with the name Thomas Eden, third Baron Hall, upon it—and with a momentary sense of dread—yet with a wild sense of welcoming my new life—I turned and began to examine the objects that lay all about me.

“I touched the easels—ran my palms along the edges of canvases—threw myself happily down upon the wretched bed. I sprang up—went to the window—threw open the sash. I noticed with a kind of rapture that it was composed of many small colorless panes, one of which had been replaced by a pane of blue glass. Deeply I drew in—through hungry nostrils—the dark-green scents of the night. I heard the sound of hooves and carriage wheels on the moonlit cobblestones below. Beyond the street lay a walled park—whence I could hear sounds of fiddle music—and see the lights of many lanterns—and looking down upon the festive park—the carriages—the high-stepping horses—my heart swelled with such happiness—as only the damned may imagine.

“For even then—even then—in the midst of my innocent joy—I tasted a darker sensation. There was disdain in it—and bitterness—

and weariness of heart. For already I was shedding my sense of freshness—already I was becoming a human creature. These darker feelings of which I speak—were those that I bore with me from the other world—feelings that had been imagined into me by my creator—and now lived in me like my blood itself. I was proud—destitute—obscurely ruined—all this I dimly understood—as I looked down at the happy world beneath me. At this moment the door opened—and I turned round with a moment's fear—yet with that self-command which had been painted into my lordly features—into my very soul.

"I stood coolly there, prepared to sacrifice my life for the sake of striking an attitude. Generations of imagined ancestors had bred into my character a sublime capacity for phlegm. The drunken lout came stumbling into the moonlit chamber—and slamming the door behind him—began fumbling about for his candles. I was standing directly in a ray of moonlight that cut across my sullen and disdainful mouth. In the midst of his wretched fumbling—he happened to notice a form by the window—and mumbling an 'Oh, h'lo, just a second'—I translate freely from the German, which I understood perfectly—continued his boorish business. 'Can't seem to find the *verfluchte* matches,' he muttered—patting his pockets—falling down—pushing aside piles of canvas. 'What were we talking about? Ah yes, the wretched fools, they're blind yet they treat me like a beggar. I hope they all fry in hell. Don't just stand there, give a fellow a hand.' 'With the greatest pleasure,' I replied—in fluent German—with the trace of an English accent. 'Permit me to observe,' I continued, 'that you placed the matches behind that portrait of a plate of potatoes.' 'Did I? Yes, there they are, those potatoes look good enough to eat, Jack. Can't recall your name, come to think of it. Were you waiting a long, here we go, there.' A candleflame sprang up—the drunken blockhead stared at it for the space of a minute—then rose from the floor and sighed. Turning to me he said: 'Say, you don't have a smoke, do you? No, didn't think so.' He sighed again and appeared to notice me for the first time. A puzzled expression passed over his besotted features. I observed his foolish antics with helpless aplomb. His expression changed to one of happy drunkenness—and still holding the stub of candle in its tin holder—he came up to me and looked out the window.

" 'Observe the ironic spectacle of earth,' said he, 'the rich burghers with their fat-cheeked wives below, and up above, neglected Art in its shabby garret. Perhaps some blue-eyed daughter of the well-fed herd gazes up at the poor candle in the gable window, dreaming of the artist in his wretchedness. Observe that round bosom bursting its bodice. They want their portraits to look like their food—rich, glistening, tasty, causing a slight indigestion. The soul isn't worth a

pfennig—down with it. And so life passes, eh, friend?’

“He turned to me with a melancholy smile and again a puzzled expression passed over his sodden features. He held up the candle to my face and all at once he looked as if he would burst into tears. He appeared to control himself and passed his hands over his eyes. ‘A memorable night.’ I remarked. ‘Mnemosyne,’ he obscurely replied—and turning from me—made his way over to the corner where my portrait stood leaning on a shelf. I watched him lift the candle and saw in the framed painting my abandoned garret with its ruffled bed. An odd whimpering sound issued from him—and turning round so that he was again facing me—he began to back slowly away—holding out before him the trembling candle—and feeling the wall with his other hand. A picture crashed to the floor but he paid it not the slightest attention. Despite the gaze of supreme contempt with which I honored the farcical scene being enacted before me—I was in truth troubled by his damnable terror—and stepping from the window—I said calmly: There is surely no cause to—’

“A missile hit the wall beside me and clattered to the floor. My movement appeared to have driven him to a frenzy—and he now began hurling at me whatever he could lay his hands on—canvases—tubes of paint—sketchbooks—an old shoe. The devil!’ I cried as something sharp struck my upper arm. I heard a sobbing sound and saw the candle drop. Kicking my way through the trash on his floor—I reached the dangerous flame—extinguished it with a stamp of my foot—flung a look of contempt at the huddled form in the dark—and turning on my heel—strode to the door—pulled it violently open—and stepped into freedom.

“I descended rapidly five or six flights of creaking wooden stairs—pushed open a heavy door—and found myself on a cobblestoned street. Across the way rose the wall of the park. Horse-drawn carriages rattled by—well-dressed burghers gazed out at me—yellow lanterns at the ends of posts cast long shadows. I skulked along, attempting to keep well out of the lantern-light—feeling myself a monster and an outcast—and following a blind instinct that urged me away from the scene of my unspeakable birth. Yet as I made my way all too visibly along the pedestrian walk—I noticed that I attracted the attention of more than one fashionable Frau or rosy-cheeked Fraulein—who gazed at me with admiring eyes. Obscurely I recalled a precocious history of easy conquests, fashionable liaisons, *affaires de coeur*—the usual tedious adventures of my set and class. In a black casement-pane illuminated by the glow of a street lantern—I saw the proud sullen face of an Englishman—with a piercing gray eye—thick-tangled locks—and a sulky disdainful mouth. It was a rather obvious and facile sort of second-rate beauty—deepened by the hint of a troubling secret—the

kind of beauty well calculated to enthrall the hearts of bored matrons and dreaming girls brought up on a steady diet of tumultuous claptrap—directed against the principles of balance, reason, and classical restraint.

“Soothed by the knowledge that I was not hideous—yet tortured by my hideous secret—and troubled by attracting so much attention—I continued on my way. In the wall across the avenue an open gateway appeared. I crossed the street and entered the park. Lanterns of many colors hung from the trees—students clashed their steins at small tables—and filling the air—bright sounds of laughter and fiddle music. I made my way beyond the Lustgarten and entered darker paths. There for the first time I felt free. I was disappointed when the small wood ended—and another wall appearing—I pulled myself over the top.

“On this side of the park the streets were narrower and darker. I pressed on through the cobbled alleyways, impelled by an obscure urge. In a dark street painted women with half-bared breasts sat in dimlit windows. After a while the streets turned to dirt—the houses grew farther apart—in the distance I saw low hills. I entered a field—behind me I saw the town against the dark-blue night sky. Beyond the field I came to an orchard. Weary and hungry—yet driven on—I made my way along orchard paths—ate stolen apples—drank at a cold stream. Then I entered a wood on the slope of a hill. At the top of the hill I saw below me in the moonlit distance a wood—a river—a walled town. Behind me I saw the town I had fled. I determined to make my way to the new city as soon as I had gathered my strength—and on the wooded hilltop I rested at last—sitting with my back against a mossy tree.

3. Ignotus

“Before dawn I rose and by midmorning I had reached the city wall. I was not stopped at the gate and soon found myself in a maze of narrow cobbled lanes. Women seated at stalls were peddling fish—apples—black bread; a horse pulling a cartful of blood-red cherries came clapping down a street. In a small square—half-sun and half-shadow—children were trundling hoops. A linden stood beside a stone well. At the end of a dark cobbled lane the streets became wider—the gabled houses statelier—and I soon came to a sunny square with a great stone fountain in the middle. Smart carriages pulled by sleek horses were going up and down a broad avenue lined with linden trees. I sat down on the steps of the fountain—worn and hungry still—yet eager to feast my eyes on the spectacle before me. Had I foreseen

my fate—I'd sooner have flung myself under the wheels of a phaeton—than sat dreaming like an ass. But I was young—and hopeful—and eager to enter the great world I saw before me—and I could almost imagine that the strange events of the last night had been a troubling dream—scattered by the rays of the vivifying sun.

"I had in my pocket a few small coins, which served to secure me two weeks' lodging in a shabby garret at the far end of town. I lived on black bread and fruit, and had no clothes save those on my back. Yet far from despairing I was high-spirited—pleased to be alive—and trustful of fortune. Sometimes when I look back on my miserable life, I linger in those weeks as in my no-life's paradise. I was up every day at dawn, and rambled over every cobble of that bustling town—from the shabbiest lanes to the end of the broadest avenue—from the quiet Tiergarten with its flowerbeds and fishponds—to the imposing estates of the nobility along the banks of the Bree—from the shady lanes of the medieval university—to the dirty alleys of the prostitutes' quarters. Grünau was an oddly pleasing mixture of the old and the new. The medieval Rathaus—with its Gothic towers—stood at the end of a modern avenue with the newest shops—selling frockcoats—optical instruments—carriage furnishings—pianofortes—and the latest timepieces. One was forever turning from a bustling street—into a sleepy square where a maiden with braided hair was drawing water from a well. It did not escape my attention that such maidens—suddenly surprised—would commonly blush—and invariably smile. In sober truth I was smiled at by a goodly number of the fair sex—from frowsy applewomen with their shiny red apples—to apple-cheeked Frauen walking arm in arm with their tophat-ted husbands down Franz Wilhelmstrasse, on a Sunday afternoon. And more than once from a passing landau or phaeton—a pair of blue eyes—or sparkling black eyes—would flash out at the interesting young Englishman—surely a lord?—who sat in a charming pose—without a cravat!—for the wretch had painted me bare-necked—watching the world go by. Yet as if confident that my fate lay in one of those smiles—I took no advantage of the fair invitation—but walked my solitary way.

"Well, solitary after a fashion—for I was no stranger to the pleasure gardens of Grünau's Altstadt—where an impoverished Englishman of noble bearing could sit for hours over a penny stein of beer—and where I soon fell in with a local blood or two. It is in my nature to express myself strongly, and with feeling, if at all. Such a nature attracts friends—and makes enemies. I was soon the center of a small circle. We drank—we dined—we spoke knowingly of women. I told vague tales of England—said I was on a grand tour—and alluded darkly to a misfortune. My want of a cravat—intolerable in a native—

was readily forgiven me—and even admired—for there was much talk of freedom from convention—returning to Nature—and such cant—though none of these spouters of fashionable phrases was bold enough to alter a button—or surrender to principle one frill of a jabot. I could not however avoid the exchange of names—and pausing some moments—I at length replied—with a look that forbade amusement or enquiry—‘Ignotus.’

“Among these superficial companions was a young buck—the eldest son of a margrave—with a passion for folk ballads—horses—and all things English. He insisted upon speaking to me in a very nearly flawless—though somewhat bookish English—and seemed to take a special interest in me. Von Harnack was a bit of a fop—and more than a bit of an ass—but his good-nature was genuine—and he insisted one late afternoon upon accompanying me home. I had hitherto refused to reveal the whereabouts of my shabby lodgings—but on this occasion was amused to yield to entreaty—as one sometimes does—for no reason. Von Harnack followed me with evident surprise into my wretched neighborhood—and climbed with me to my grim garret—where he sat chatting for a while without taking the slightest notice of my surroundings. Shortly afterwards he stood up—shook my hand—and departed. Several hours later my landlady came clattering up the stairs—and delivered a large package—which she said had been left by a servant. The package contained a cherry-red waistcoat gallooned in gold—and a nut-brown tailcoat with a velvet collar—half a dozen cravats—black velvet breeches—gray silk stockings—a fine malacca stick—a dress sword—and a pair of buckled pumps. I tore off my soiled garments and costumed myself in the rather foppish but stylish German dress—yet dispensing with a cravat—which I found insufferably confining—and as I gazed at the man of fashion in my stained mirror—and saw the great world opening up before me—I experienced a sudden sadness—for it was as if my carefree youth had ended.

“Von Harnack was enchanted when he greeted me the next morning at my table at the Lustgarten—though he kept up the fiction that he was innocent of having a hand in the matter—suggesting that Ignotus had captured the heart of some fair charmer. Ennobled by my clothes—and instructed by von Harnack—who had knocked about the world a bit—it proved an easy matter to obtain credit with the foremost Jew money-lenders of Grüna. I took lodgings in the fashionable part of town—and was soon become that boring thing—a man about town. I was now to be found in the most fashionable drawing rooms—where I confess I was not at ease—and often hung brooding back—instead of uttering the polite idiocies required of me.

“Yet my very aloofness—while it offended some—rendered me on

the whole more interesting to most. The fair sex in particular were attracted by the handsome young Milord—who defied society by refusing to wear a cravat—though the more perceptive of them were critical of my somewhat hackneyed beauty. I took a mistress, as I was obliged to do—the febrile young wife of an antiquated count—and was soon bored to death by her incessant demands—her stormy outbursts—and her tedious raptures—for she had the detestable habit of rattling on about the holiness of the body—in the very act of being keyed. It ended scandalously, with a scene at dinner. The old count called me out, and on a chilly dawn in a beechwood—accompanied by von Harnack and a young poet as seconds—I strolled to the mark—lifted my pistol—and fired coolly into the air—while the old devil of a count did his damndest to put a bullet through my brain—but succeeded only in wounding me lightly on the left hand. The reputation of a rake did me no harm, and I was soon swept into the ample arms of a pretty young duchess—who, it was said, had had so many lovers—that she had spent very little of her adult life standing up—and whose pale husband tolerated her numerous infidelities in return for certain *recherché* favors—which she was said to bestow upon him with all the liberality of her generous nature. Such was the noble life I led. Fits of black despair would come over me, and I would withdraw into solitude; but misery was in fashion, in the upper circles of Grüнау, and my reputation was only enhanced.

4. *Julia*

“One afternoon when I strolled into the Lustgarten—where I was accustomed to meet with a gallant or two—I happened to remark von Harnack on a secluded path—walking with a young girl I had never seen before. I rambled over—but seeing his look of annoyance—confined myself to a polite bow—and passed on. The girl was very young—and tolerably pretty—with a striking head of jetblack hair—worn unfashionably free—hatless—blowing in the wind—and adorned with a simple satin ribbon. She wore a summer walking-dress and carried a pair of long yellow gloves. Something in that dress—or that hair—or the tilt of that head—created a sense of great innocence and purity—remarkable enough in any female—and doubly remarkable in any piece found hanging on the arm of von Harnack. I was much amused. Von Harnack had the habit of boasting rather fatuously of his conquests, yet had omitted to mention this one. If it was a secret—I for one was not going to betray him—and therefore said nothing to the grinning companions who soon gathered round me. Yet I could not get the girl out of my thoughts—and breaking

abruptly from the company—I returned to my rooms—where a terrible restlessness came over me. The face of the girl haunted me—and in that pure light—I seemed to see my pleasure-loving life as something ugly, sordid, and vile.

“That evening in the resplendent drawing-room of a reigning *belle*—I saw von Harnack flirting with a countess. When he caught my eye he seemed a trifle disconcerted, but recovered at once. He came gliding over to me—and fell into light talk—lowering his voice to make slanderous asides concerning this and that ample-bosomed creature who came milkily into view—but making no mention of our little *rencontre* earlier in the day. I kept up the farce—but found myself unaccountably vexed at the necessity for pretense—and looking about—I seemed to see nothing but cruel, glittering she-devils and fatuous leering fops—whose sole ambition was to relieve the monotony of their inconceivably empty and useless lives—by rubbing their dry bodies together in the miserable hope of striking a spark. Von Harnack had a most damnable habit of roving with his eyes while he talked—and though I had borne it before with philosophy—this night I could scarcely endure it. I was on the verge of saying something pointedly unpleasant—when he bowed off in the middle of an infinitive to go sailing after a dewy-eyed duchess—whose snowy bosom was so exposed—that wits had dubbed her *Die Jungfrau*—not after the Blessed Virgin—but after the mountain. My head felt as if it would burst. I left the drawing-room—wandered through several empty chambers—and stepped into the garden. The poet Wernicke, leering drunkenly, stood resting an elbow on the shoulder of a marble Venus. ‘Ah,’ said he, raising a glass of ruby-red wine, ‘the brooding Englishman. *Ma chère Madame*, permit me to introduce you to rose-cheeked Adonis. Ah, he says nothing, the divine Englishman. It is part of his charm. They have conquered half the world by banishing all expression from their countenances. We Germans are too emotional, too sentimental. I, for instance, cannot conceal from the indifferent stars that I am smitten; smitten, my friend. I refer, of course, to the divine Julia. Have you seen her, *mon vieux*? Von Harnack’s little sister, she of the angelic *joue* and the madonna *moue*. She will set a new fashion among us. Diana shall reign supreme, and you, *chère Madame*, shall be banished to Paris. Have you not seen her, the divine Julia?’

“I felt like tearing out his tongue, but instead remarked: ‘I have heard her mentioned. Does von Harnack keep her hidden?’

“ ‘Ah, she is not for the likes of us, the sublime Julia. She is on a visit to her *petit père*, from Dresden—or was it Heaven? Von Harnack is rather cumbered with her at present. The poor boy is forced to show her about while concealing her from his wicked companions and conducting three rather sordid affairs. Ah, *ma chère Madame*, permit me

to bite your nipples. You will learn to conceal your bosom, like the divine Julia, whose reign has begun. Would that I were a handsome English lord! I think I shall write a sonnet to my saint. Ah, Englishman, how painful it is to be in love!

" 'Pray cease your disgusting chatter before I throw you into the pond,' I remarked—and turning on my heel I strode off—carrying with me the image of Wernicke's smiling mouth beneath eyes that had already turned cold with surprise.

"Von Harnack was unable to keep his sister's visit a secret. Within three days the presence of Julia von Harnack was so well known that he dropped all attempt at concealment and referred wryly and wearily to the difficulties of existence. Julia von Harnack was sixteen years old. Her father, the Margrave—a notorious old roué—had insisted on bringing up his daughter as a strict Catholic—although the old devil had been persuaded to stop short of shutting her up in a convent. The persuader in the case was his sister, the Countess von Kötschener. The Margravine having died of a pulmonary complaint several years after the birth of her only daughter—Julia had been raised by the Countess—a firm Catholic whom scandal had never touched—and who, secure in the strength of her goodness—could afford to be more generous in her notions of nurture than could her immoral and rigid brother. It was she who had insisted that von Harnack take his sister to the Lustgarten—and she again who had finally persuaded the old Margrave—who was said to be frightened of his pious sister—to permit his daughter to be introduced to the cream of the Grüнау nobility at a fête to be held a week hence at Schloss Rosenheim—the Margrave's summer palace on the Königsee.

"Von Harnack dropped out of sight for a time and I spent the week in a continual fever of restlessness. The vision of Julia had entered me like an unhappiness—like a punishment—like a disease. That face was my life—my death. By the night of the fete I felt that my entire life hung in the balance. I entered the drawing-room—my heart aflame—my face cold—indifferent—expressionless—and saw her at once. She was standing between her father and the Countess. I cannot even now explain it—but I experienced a bitter disappointment. I beheld a young girl—of a rather commonplace order of prettiness—neither striking nor beautiful—behaving perfectly—looking about with interest—smiling sweetly when any grinning booby babbled a civil syllable to her—all told, an ordinary young woman of the higher nobility. What had become of the angel and goddess of my fevered imagination? I exchanged a few coldly polite phrases with her—observed the slightness of her neck and shoulders—I detest spidery women—and turned impatiently away. The heat was stifling. I stepped outside. On the grassy bank of the Königsee I threw myself

down on a garden seat. Deep unhappiness—like the pain of waking from a rapturous dream—spread in me like a darkness. On a gravel path I heard the crunch of a step. ‘It is only God and Englishmen who contemplate the sorrows of the universe with such sublime impassivity. Is it not splendid, the meaningless show of Nature? I too am melancholy, for I have gazed into the eyes of a cruel goddess. Is she not bewitching, the divine Julia?’ I rose at once—and without turning round—strode into the intolerable night.

5. *A Carriage and a Garden*

“I returned to my former ways—yet without pleasure—gazing coldly upon my revels as upon the wretched frivolities of a soul not my own. I felt betrayed—wounded of spirit—and avoided Julia von Harnack as I should avoid a woman who deliberately sought my harm. Why—man—it was as if she had brought me to the verge of a feeling—a revelation—only to abandon me there—laughing at me the while. I was hot-tempered—restless—ready to come to blows over fancied stares. I felt damned—doomed—dimmed—I know not what the devil I felt. It was in this amiable mood that one evening at about midnight—feeling the need of motion—yet having nowhere to go—I walked alone to the fountain in the square where I had first sat on the day of my arrival in Grüna. I sat down on the moonlit marble rim. My stick clattered against stone. As I watched the passing carriages, I compared the happiness of my early days with the unhappy present hour. The insufferable triteness of this thought enraged me—I felt that my very suffering was incapable of rising above the commonplace. At this propitious moment a landau passed close to where I sat, and threw a pebble against my leg. I leaped up with a curse—fully prepared to halt the carriage and drag the driver from his box—and gazed into the astonished eyes of Julia von Harnack.

“I felt something blaze in my breast—it was as if I had swallowed fire—and I knew that without those eyes—that face—that soul—my life was a living damnation. I heard a shout—the carriage stopped—turned—came back on the other side—and von Harnack cried: ‘It’s he—you’re unimpeachably right, *ma soeur*—why, I thought you’d hanged yourself—come join us, *O fantôme de la nuit*—if you can bear the idea of clattering about town behind these fiery steeds—lo, the phantom moves—’tis he indeed, *ma chère Julie*—I know him by his evil Saxon eye—’

“I entered the fatal carriage and threw myself into a corner. A crack of the whip—and we lurched into the night. Julia was animated—ah, there was a wildness of delight in her—cheeks burning—eyes

flashing—never had I imagined her like that. As we rushed madly through the slowly emptying streets—faster! faster! cried von Harnack—Julia looked out eagerly at the crazed, enchanted night. The wind blew her hair about—she smiled—she laughed—she pointed girlishly—was radiant as the moon—lord, she flashed like fire. Von Harnack, for his part, was whimsical—bored—and drunk. He had promised the Countess to be more attentive to his little sister—and having returned before midnight after a narrow escape from the husband of one of his mistresses—he had thrown pebbles at Julia’s window and urged her to escape into the night. The girl—delighted—had climbed down into the garden on a rope of knotted bedsheets. The wild night-ride animated her strangely—and without coarsening her—brought fire to the darkness of her eyes. Rushing shadow-stripes rippled over her moonlit face. Von Harnack subsided into slumber. Now her eyes were grave with wonder—now they blazed with delight. ‘Look at that rainspout, Ignotus,’ she said, ‘it looks like Herr Wernicke’s nose—and look, that tree is bending just like the Countess von Hauffenfels, when she wants my brother to look at her famous bosom—and look, oh my! don’t you think that house looks just like an Englishman, so formal, so cold . . .’

“Ah, she mocked me, she teased me, the saintly enchantress! She spoke to me as if she had known me always—as if we were children at play—as if I were a natural part of that mad unnatural night. Swept into the clattering coach, I seemed shaken loose from myself—and taking sight from her eyes—and fire from her fire—I saw grotesque shapes in each object that we passed—and to the music of her laughter I turned the dashing clattering night into savage parody. So we rode wildly through the streets of Grünau, matching wit and laughter—while up above, the jealous gods looked down—preparing my damnation. Kicking off her shoes—which in any other woman would have been lascivious—she sat with her feet tucked under her—arms on the window ledge—chin on her arms—hair blowing about her—gazing out with a look of sadness that pierced me to the soul—for it was as if she knew the enchanted night must end.

“Have I painted her? Do you see her? If not, write me down an ass—I’m a miserable beggar and deserve hanging. But if so, then you’re in love with her—and I’m jealous as a tiger—devil take you—I’ll cut you to pieces. You sit there smug as the Thirty-nine Articles—complacent as a pagod on a pedestal—pray forgive me—it’s my damnable nature—I was carried away by the thought of her—Morpheus, wake up, damn you—don’t he look innocent—snoring away there—aye, he knows what it is—the fire in your blood—and the hook in your heart.

“Carried away, was I? Carried away, then! Yes, she carried me away—as the coach carried me away—as the night carried me away—never to come back. In a sense, you see, that night never ended. So

began my wooing of Julia von Harnack. Her brother twitted me—and looked strangely at me—and pretended I was mad—and did all he could, to ingratiate me with the aunt—and rid himself of the burden of looking after his sister. One night, slightly drunk, he indicated he had something to say to me. He coughed into his fist—sighed—and said he must enquire—whether my intentions were as they say honorable—that is to say—just between men of the world—all women were fair game—the sweet bitches—but as an upholder of the family honor—and so forth—and in short, if I should ever see fit to induce his sister to part with her chastity—that inestimable gem in the family jewel case—it would be his melancholy duty to put a bullet through my head—no offense intended. At his clownish and inept words the blood leaped to my throat—and I'd have gladly stuck a dagger in his heart—if I hadn't suspected he'd been sent to sound me—and if I'd not recollected, how until quite recently I had been leading a life quite as dissolute as his. I held down my rage—and assured him coldly—that I was in love with his sister—and desired her hand in marriage—and that if anyone should intimate a different intention—I would not scruple—to cut out his tongue. These few remarks I delivered with such cold fury—that he seemed to wake from his half-drunk stupor—and for a moment looked at me in a puzzled, helpless way—as if I were eluding his grasp.

"I did not hesitate to make my wishes known—on separate occasions—to Julia and to her aunt. The Countess—a charming and highly cultivated woman—who knew the world well, and forgave it much—appeared to like me despite my unsavory reputation—and told me quite frankly that she could not speak for her niece—whose heart was a mystery—who had never yet loved—and who was, therefore, of an uncompromising idealism in all matters of the affections. With a penetrating look, the Countess told me to try my hand, but warned me not to expect an easy success. She added—that if Julia appeared to favor me—she would 'work the Margrave'—whose resistance to the notion of a foreign and un-Catholic son-in-law was formidable—but not insurmountable.

"As for Julia—she listened to me with a seriousness—an earnestness—a want of suspicion or confusion—that touched me to the core. It was, you see, as if she accepted my proposal as her due. She said she did not know whether she loved me—and could marry no one she did not love—but wished to continue seeing me. There was a want of affectation in all she said—that went into my blood. Nevertheless I was uneasy after this interview, which I reported privately to the Countess—who assured me that the issue was better than she had supposed—and urged me not to lose heart. By means of her conniving we were often left alone. More than once at such times Julia would question me about my past—and always I grew uneasy

under that earnest gaze. Sometimes, when she turned aside, I fancied she was sparing me the embarrassment of having been caught out in a concealment. Yet she did not discourage me—seemed indeed to accept me as an official suitor—and I could feel at times a stillness around us—as if all of Grünewald were waiting for her answer.

“The Countess quickly became my confidante, and threw herself heart and soul into my camp. I fancy now I was half in love with her—and she with me. Had it not been for the niece—I think the aunt could have stolen my heart away—though she was twice my age. More than once I was sorely tempted to confide in her completely—but always I drew back—for my secret was of so monstrous a nature—as to chill the blood of a saint. I confess I felt more at ease in her presence than in Julia’s—for though the Countess was spotless—yet she knew the world well—whereas Julia—my Julia—well, Julia was innocent—as the Countess and I were not.

“One day when the three of us were out strolling in the garden of Rosenheim—which was of the stiff and intricate French variety and not of the recently fashionable English kind—Julia appeared to be in one of her gay, lively moods. While the Countess and I walked our sober way along the hedged paths and the rosegardens—Julia tripped lightly here and there—chattering and laughing—exclaiming over a flower—or a fountain—or a marble nymph. Skipping ahead of us to the rosebushes that encircled an ornamental pool—she plucked a red rose and held it to her face—breathing it deeply in—and rubbing the crimson petals against her cheek. At the touch of the petals on her cheek—she gave a little shudder—and smiling strangely—dropped the rose into the dark water. Gazing at us she said with sudden earnestness: ‘You know, Aunt, the two of you look so lovely like that—so lovely—as if you belonged together.’ At this a light flush spread over the cheeks of the Countess—who replied laughing: ‘My dear, you are sometimes such a child.’ Julia’s dark eyes looked grave. She stared at her aunt as if in a trance—and suddenly crying out, ‘I’m not a child!’—she burst into tears—turned red for shame—and ran sobbing away. I made a motion to follow—but the Countess placing a hand on my arm—said, ‘No, Ignatius’—and walked after her. I remained pacing up and down in torment—slashing at roses with my stick. After a short time the Countess returned alone. She appeared thoughtful but said at once: ‘It’s all right, my friend. She thought, you see, I had intended to ridicule her,’ ‘Surely Julia cannot have mistaken your harmless—’ ‘Ah, dear foolish Ignatius, don’t you see? It has happened at last. She has fallen in love with you.’ At these words I felt something burst in my breast—and I turned my face away, like a child who would hide the passion of his tears.

“We were engaged within the fortnight, and our wedding was set

for six months thence — on the day of Julia's seventeenth birthday.

6. A Fateful Encounter

"It was during the first of these months — that an incident occurred — which even now, when I look back on it — pray do not suppose I am insensible of triteness — the well-worked rhythmus — these execrable phrases — bred into my blood like the germs of a disease. Morpheus — are you awake? — damn you — I know you're listening. He has said in his cups — that language by its very nature — is unnatural — that all a poor devil can do — is make himself master of the accumulated clichés of his age — a damnable theory — well, it may be, it may be — but as I was saying — and devil take it — an incident occurred — which even now, when I look back on it — this is surely the most insufferable sentence ever uttered by a vacillating wretch in the throes of an immemorial despair. The incident occurred in the drawing-room of the summer palace of the Baroness von Lichtenberg. The Baroness was an old friend of the Countess and had, in a manner, taken us up. She was eighty if she was anything — and gave out she was forty — though she might have been four hundred for anything I know — a plump old relic of another era — fat powdered cheeks — merry blue eyes — and a bosom like a bale of hay. She flaunted the latest fashions shamelessly — parading about in a fantastical turban with three-foot ostrich plumes — and a scandalous chemise-gown that introduced more of her person than one was inclined to meet — all the while keeping up a flurry of flirtatious chatter that would have shamed a giddy girl at her first ball — yet managed never to be ridiculous — by some trick of charm these antiquated females sometimes have. Everything about her bore witness of an older time — yet as if determined to keep up the pretense of youthfulness — she surrounded herself with the latest in the way of furniture — gewgaws — gardens — statues — paintings — poets — philosophies — what have you. Often she would ask my opinion of some French or German scribbler she had taken up — she had swooned over *Werther* in her day, but now considered it quite *passé* — and she spoke of the Jena philosophers as if Schelling and the Schlegels had just dropped in to dine.

"It was therefore not in the least surprising — one evening — to see a small group standing near a wall — making clever remarks about the latest painting picked up by the indefatigable Baroness. I — as you can well imagine — did my utmost to avoid all pictures — though in the natural course of things I was forced to utter my own parcel of cant concerning this and that latest masterpiece. On this occasion there seemed no help for it. The irrepressible Baroness — as soon as she saw

me—came over all in a flutter—held out her powdered cheek for me to kiss—whispered something to Julia which made the poor girl blush—and seizing each of us by the arm—pulled us in the direction of the little group.

“We shall let the divine Julia be judge,” remarked Wernicke as we came up to them. ‘Come, fair lady. Do you see before you a comic masterpiece, or a stale and facile product of the latest school? Observe that the artist, in a fit of modesty no doubt, has omitted to affix his signature. *Mon cher Ignote*, what seems to be—’ ‘Trash!’ I hissed savagely—and saw all about me—looks of dismay and embarrassment. I clumsily mastered myself—but not before the blood had rushed to my temples—and my soul flashed from my eyes. I saw before me the gloomy painting of an empty bed in a garret—and on a rude chair—a cast-off cravat—and a polished walking-stick. A small plaque read: PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG MAN. I felt a trembling in my knees—and a wild beating in my temples—the blood drained from my face—and a faintness came over me—yet I could not tear my eyes from the hideous painting—and the room seemed to vanish from sight. Somewhere a voice said, ‘Ignotus! What is it? What is it?’ I looked down into the eyes of Julia—with an effort I composed myself—and muttering an apology to the astonished Baroness—and to the alarmed and tearful Julia—said I was not feeling well—and turning on my heel—strode away.

“Owing to my reputation as a brooding English lord of the inflammable variety—subject to abrupt fits of rage—sullenness of temper—and black despair—the incident was overlooked, though not forgotten. I informed Julia the next day that I had experienced an attack of dizziness—mentioned a childhood illness—and found myself under the obligation of allaying a new alarm in her—which I but partially ventured to do—relieved to have distracted her from the true source of my illness. For I was sick—do you understand me—sick—sick as no human creature can ever be—sick to the depths of my soul. From the moment I saw that hateful painting I had no peace. It haunted me—it fed on me like a worm on a rose—draining the color from my cheeks—and the joy from my spirit. And worst of all—I felt the growth of a secret craving. For so it is, with our curst kind. As surely as we wake from that sleep)—so we must return to the frame—if only for an hour—compelled by what dark necessity I cannot say. In the sleepless nights I cursed the Baroness—and Chance—and Fate—but had I not seen the painting—sooner or later the craving would have come—and I should have gone to seek it—though it had been necessary to cross the fires of hell. So the sickness entered me—and the craving grew—till my life was intolerable to me—intolerable I tell you—and worst of all—worst of all—Julia’s troubled eyes—seeking to

meet my always averted gaze.

"I did what had to be done: I spoke to the Countess. I explained that it was necessary for me to go away for a time—and I let her understand, by means of a long look, that my absence had to do with a woman. My look said: it cannot be avoided—you must help me—I rely on your discretion. Though unspoken, it was my first lie to her, and what it cost me you may well imagine. The Countess returned my gaze for a long time—then placing her hand lightly on my arm replied: 'I will manage her. Return quickly, my friend. She is very precious.' At this I felt like throwing myself at her feet—and confessing the truth to that noble soul—but I dared not—I dared not—and grasping her hand—kissed it passionately. She withdrew it at once—there was a flush in her cheek—and going to the window she stood with her back to me—gazing out at the dusk till I was gone.

"I took leave of my friends—hinting of business transactions connected with my mysterious past—and rode through the North Gate as conspicuously as possible—in the middle of a sunny morning. Far beyond the walls of Grüнау I changed direction—and came in time to a wild unfrequented wood—which lay behind the Baroness's summer palace. I tied my horse to a tree beside an abandoned woodcutter's hut—and waited restlessly till dark—before making my way from the wood to the orchard—where I stood looking across the moonlit park at the back of the Schloss.

"The light of fiery chandeliers brightened all the windows—sounds of laughter reached my ears—here and there a dark form strolled by the ornamental pool near the West Wing. It was necessary for me to choose my moment carefully. As luck would have it, I was familiar with the plan of the palace and its grounds—as well as with the habits of the Baroness—who liked to keep a small, 'intimate' group with her in the East Wing after most of the guests had gone up to bed. The painting was in the West Wing. Here and there a window darkened. I made my way along the abandoned park—slipped through an open window in the West Wing—and made my way to the darkened library—where I at once concealed myself behind a thick velvet curtain.

"Some drunken fool sat snoring in a chair. I heard voices in a far room—light sounds of laughter. In a nearby chamber I heard the creak and sudden breath of a servant, blowing out the candles. I waited till all was still. Then stepping forth from my curtain—and keeping a wary eye upon the snoring guest—I passed through the moonlit library—whose skyblue ceiling was painted with white clouds and pink cherubs—and entered the drawing-room. A beam of moonlight passing through a latticed window lay across the bosom of a marble nymph. The painting was clearly visible and I strode up to it directly. I

felt a yearning which I can only compare to the desire one experiences shortly before falling upon a woman. I moved closer—placed my hands lightly on the base of the frame—felt a sense of swooning dissolution—as if my vitals were being sucked out of me—and as I entered the paint—drawn up and in by what hideous process none can say—I fell into a sleep that was more than sleep—for it was the peace of nothingness.

7. *Mistress and Bride*

“I was awakened by a babble of voices, and a sensation of light against my eyelids. ‘Absolutely shocking,’ ‘*Incroyable?*’ ‘An extraordinary likeness, one would almost think that he . . .’ ‘Of course she’s terribly upset, who would do such a . . .’ ‘. . . repulsive sense of humor . . .’ ‘. . . quite talented if you . . .’ Consciousness came flooding back—but I did not stir—for I was still fixed in the paint. I felt against my face the breath of their talk—and against my closed eyelids moved the flicker of many candles. And I was filled with such contempt, such weariness . . . Wernicke was more than usually clever that night. He demonstrated that the extraordinary joke could have been perpetrated only by someone who knew Ignotus intimately—for the artist had captured not merely his un-German fashion of buttoning his coat—not merely the precise manner in which his lower lip turned slightly down at the edges—and the very mole—lightly powdered—beside that lip—but had managed to express the dark and troubled nature of their mysterious friend—whose soul appeared to live in shadow—and who for that very reason enjoyed a notorious success with women—not one of whom could resist a dark secret. Wernicke went on to argue—that the Baroness’s wretched and risible painting—so far from being ruined—had in fact been turned by the impudent jester into a work of mimetic genius—and although he was merely being clever—I was uneasy under that close and mocking scrutiny. He pointed out that it had been a mistake for the prankster to paint me in German dress—since the pawnbroker’s ticket gave the name of an English lord. When the talk turned to my disappearance, Wernicke suggested facetiously that I had stepped into the canvas. There was general laughter—the conversation turned to the disappearance of Ignotus—women and money were produced as motives. One wondered how the calm, tempestuous Englishman would react to the little jest, upon his return. New voices arrived. It was a long while before silence came—like a cool hand on my fevered brow.

“Later that night I emerged from the frame. I did not once look back as I made my way through the darkened rooms of the West

Wing. Escaping through a recessed window in the library—I passed along the hedgerows of the deserted park—startled once by a pale woman who proved to be a marble nixie. In the wood beyond the orchard I found my hungry, frightened horse. I led him to a stream—mounted—and rode through the woods—moving in a great half circle till I came out on the other side of the city. At dusk I entered through the North Gate and went at once to my rooms. There dashing off a note to the Countess—and another to Julia—I instructed my servant to deliver them—but my impatience was such—that no sooner had he ridden off—than I saddled a fresh horse—and rode out at a gallop to Rosenheim—coming upon my bewildered servant in the entrance hall—where he was awaiting answers to my messages. I dismissed him with the reward of a free morning for his pains—and received from another bewildered servant the two messages for myself. From the Countess—‘Come at once. Speak to no one.’ From Julia—‘O my love.’ The Countess’s mysterious communication filled me with misgivings, and I was only a little comforted by Julia’s words, which might have been written in despair.

“The servant—having delivered the messages—now announced me—and I was pacing restlessly when word came that I was to enter the Countess’s receiving room—where I found the Countess seated alone. She rose as I entered and came quickly towards me. ‘Dear, dear Ignotus,’ said she—almost tearfully. I kissed her hand fervently and looked up into her troubled gaze. ‘It is done?’ she asked quickly. ‘Yes.’ ‘Thank God!’ She turned away—relief changing to evident distress. ‘Something dreadful has happened,’ she began. I felt a sword plunge into my brain. ‘Julia?’ I cried. ‘It has been a blow,’ resumed the Countess, ‘and yet she is strong—she is surprisingly strong.’ ‘Good God, woman! Out with it! You torture me.’ ‘How pale you look, dear Ignotus! Not to waste words: there has been a minor scandal. Julia has been in tears. Philip’—she and Julia were the only ones to call von Harnack that—‘has vowed revenge. En un mot: some scoundrel of talent has painted a likeness of you—into the Baroness’s portrait of the missing young man. Philip rages and says it is an insult to the family and to Julia. The poor girl is distraught. We fear it will come to a duel. . .’ The relief that flooded my breast must have shown in my face, for the Countess stepped back with a worried—yet searching look.

“ ‘But dear Countess, I thought you were speaking of something else. You know as well as I—that my inestimable brother-to-be—has a tendency to wild exaggeration. Is it so terrible, this likeness? In any case, I see no reason why he should take it upon himself. . .’ As I rattled on in this strain—a look of relief and puzzlement appeared in her face—for evidently she had expected me to be hot with indignation. I felt in fact like baring my soul to her—and begging for

absolution. Instead I began to question her about the portrait. At this moment Julia came in—and seeing me there—gave a little cry—raised her hand to her mouth—came running over—and threw her arms around me. Tears streamed down her cheeks. My breast seemed to crack open with tenderness. ‘It’s all right,’ I murmured, ‘everything will be all right now’—and at the sound of my words I felt that I too needed to be comforted.

“As Julia dried her eyes, von Harnack came striding in—looked startled upon seeing me there—and coming solemnly over—my damnable brother was well on the way to becoming a pompous ass—told us the latest news: that the scandalous likeness had quite vanished overnight—leaving no trace at all. Julia was relieved—the Countess thoughtful—I full of questions—von Harnack in a stew. It was necessary for us all to ride out to the Baroness at once. There we examined the mysterious painting—while the Baroness appeared not to know whether to be more delighted at the restoration of her masterpiece—or disappointed at the loss of an occasion for scandal. A discourse arose concerning the identity of the unknown trickster. A servant claimed to have seen a dark figure in the park. I did my best to endure it all with becoming aplomb. Another servant kept announcing visitors. Wernicke strode gaily in, and looking from the painting to me remarked: ‘So, the Englishman has returned from the painting,’ I began to feel oppressed—it was difficult to breathe in that atmosphere thick with witticisms. From the corner of my eye I saw Wernicke step aside and say something in low tones to the Baroness. Had he noticed something? I mentioned that I had been riding since nightfall—made my apologies—and took my leave.

“For the next foul fortnight, I and that wretched painting were the talk of the town. Every salon wit and fading duchess had their bright little hypothesis. I bridled at every mention of the accursed subject—and on one occasion let a fashionable playwright know I’d not suffer another syllable of his impudent babble. One rumor had it—that I myself had been the perpetrator of the little joke—my violent exclamation of disgust upon first seeing the painting being adduced as evidence. It was Wernicke who plagued me most—for by some fiendish intuition of his poetic nature—he had hit upon the truth—but curst by his essential mediocrity—mistook it for a lie—and presented it as a sublime jest. ‘Ah, Englishman,’ he would say—gesturing to some whorish painting tricked out with an antique title—as *Diana Spied upon by Actaeon*—or *Pan in Pursuit of Syrinx*—‘bid her step forth, I pray,’

“Boredom is impatient of novelty. One day the topic of talk changed to the latest scandal. An antiquated duke had been caught *in flagrante* with the young mistress of an even more antiquated count—and in the ensuing battle—a masterpiece of ineptitude—the girl herself

—a daughter of the people—had knocked both lords senseless—and escaped with a servant—who bore her naked into a cottage—and announced their engagement the following day. In the face of this touching tale, the painting no longer held the slightest interest. Julia and I resumed our quiet walks. The sun shone. Birds sang. The sky was blue.

“Hell, I imagine, is much like that. Surely no one past the age of six can possibly take seriously that monotonous hell of naked sweating bodies—so pleasing to the lascivious imagination of the common sinner. No, hell is doubtless a blue sky—birds in the trees—a girl on your arm—a smile on your lips—and a knife in your soul. I loved Julia—that innocent pure creature—yet carried within me the terrible secret of my inhuman origin. Even my love had begun to alter. It was no less ardent—on the contrary, it flamed with a desperate intensity—but it seemed to me now that I loved her not as one loves an adventure upon which one is about to embark—but as one loves a country visited long ago—a country that glows in the memory with the luster of all that is fled. I was tormented by the knowledge of my difference—fearful of discovery—always suspicious—and clung to Julia as a sinner might cling to an ivory cross. And always that terrible resdness—tearing at me with its little sharp claws.

“For we are of two worlds, we accursed ones—divided against ourselves—doomed to wander the earth—more wretched than the poorest beggar rotting in a ditch—on our foreheads the mark of Cain—in our eyes the look of the damned—weary as Ahasuerus—eternal Ishmaels—forever cut off from the human harmony.

“As the day of the wedding drew near—my restlessness increased—and I experienced in the bowels of my soul—a terrible yearning to enter the picture again. I tell you, it was as if that wretched painting were an old mistress who kept her hold on me yet—drawing me to her darkness—away from my white bride. Though I did my utmost to hide my unrest—or pass it off as strong feeling—Julia sensed my masked torment—though she said nothing. Only, at times, I would catch her looking at me with a sadness that tore at my vitals. Then did I feel fire of despair in me—and tried to crush down the image that haunted me—but at night I would lie awake—filled with unspeakable yearning. At last I knew I must go—to appease the dark fever—and arming myself with rapier and dagger—for I was determined no one should stop me—and sending messages to the Countess and Julia—for I dared not face them—I set off again, one dark night, some three months before my wedding day.

8. The Great Stromboli

"And again I entered the frame—I shan't bore you with it. You must not think of me there as though I slept an enchanted sleep, like Barbarossa in his Berg. For I neither slept nor lay waking there—but lay neither living nor dead—transformed entirely. I was no longer human—no longer possessed of life—of a soul. I was—as you wish. I have discussed this doubtless edifying experience with others of my kind—and it is generally agreed—that only towards the end—when consciousness comes flooding back—is there a mixture of modes—a confusion of forms of being. One is then alive in the paint—neither one thing nor the other—or perhaps—both of each. Are there no men of integrity among you, to study these matters? Is there no one to pursue truth beyond the confines of the quotidian? But they shy away—they keep silent—the great, fainthearted ones. There are those among us who say they are alive in the picture—and free to move about there—touching the things that are pictured—nay, some who say that they have opened painted doors and discovered what lay behind. It may be so. Perhaps it is so when things are painted with that same passionate, wasting intensity—which I believe to be the source of our mystery. For my part it has never been so. The bed is but a painted bed, even as I step from it. When therefore I speak of waking—I speak in metaphor—I intend, coming to consciousness—coming to life—though still fixed in the paint. Something too much of this—I bore myself—let us continue—to the bitter end.

"I woke to awareness—once again. My first sensation was of darkness. I thought of Julia, whose sad eyes seemed to reproach me gently—and for a few restful moments I lay with my eyes closed—enjoying the peaceful dark—which seemed to shelter both of us from harm. My second sensation was of a slight shaking—accompanied by creaking sounds—and muffled thuds. This was curious. I opened my eyes—and was surprised to see that it was still entirely dark. I sat up—swung my legs over the side of the bed—and felt against my emerging legs a pressure of resistance. Still in the paint—I reached out my hand—and felt the unmistakable obstruction. It appeared to be a thick cloth, covering the entire universe. Here and there at narrow intervals I felt ribs of rope crossing in both directions. I could not emerge from the paint. I am a manful monster—a brave abortion—but for the first and last time in my abominable life—I experienced the sensation of terror. I understood—with terrible clarity—that a cloth had been tied round the painting—and held me trapped in the picture. I was able to reach out but not to emerge. Whether at the moment of reaching I was flesh—or animate paint—is a pretty question of philosophy—which imports not a doit to me. It was now that I recognized the muffled thuds as the hooves of galloping horses—and the creaking sounds as the noises of a rapidly moving carriage. Time and again I reached out

to thrust aside the wall of my prison—until at length I lay back exhausted. I do not know how many hours may have passed before the galloping hooves grew slower and came to a halt. I heard a door open—felt an odd, sliding sensation—as if someone had lifted the painting—and I lay back—breathing heavily—sensible yet fixed in the paint—neither living nor dead.

“I heard the sound of heavy footsteps climbing a wooden stairway. A second stairway—a turn—a rap—an opening door—and I came to rest with a thundering thump.

“ ‘And so we meet again,’ said a voice I had never heard before. The German was oddly liquid and musical—r’s rolled on the tongue—not growled in the throat.

“ ‘And shall, no doubt, in hell,’ said a voice I recognized only too well. ‘I have traveled all night. But your abode is too charming.’

“ ‘Do you find it so? I am so pleased.’

“ ‘Your pleasure is my desire.’

“ ‘My treasure?’

“ ‘Ah, you are skeptical. It is a common failing.’

“ ‘I am—what I am.’

“ ‘Still quoting Scripture? But you will find it worth your while.’

“ ‘And you too will find it—how shall I say—’

“ ‘Precisely. But I fear, *amico mio*, that we are beginning to sound like second-rate villains in a third-rate play which I have not yet written, and so, if you have no objection—’

“I now felt a slight swaying—unseen fingers labored at the rope—the cloth fell away—and through my eyelids I sensed a faint and flickering light. I lay quite still—for all the world like some wretched little painting.

“ ‘Is he not sublime, *le petit Anglais*? Observe the scornful lip, the noble brow. One would almost think him a pretentious daub. And yet, permit me to enquire: is he not an instance of the supremely trite, carried to the point of genius? But I see you do not believe my little tale. *Caro amico*, you must learn to be less cynical, it is not good for the soul. Come, Englishman, it is ignoble of you to keep up this sublime pretense. I am your friend—I have kept your secret well—even from the sublime, the most radiant Julia. Come, you devil, you won’t make a fool of me.’

“With that there began a rapid shaking, as if he were trying to rattle me loose from the picture. I next felt beside my face a brisk rapping—as though someone were banging on a wall just beyond my head—and I realized that he was flicking his finger at me, in the paint. I do not know how long this disgusting farce might have continued—for I was determined to thwart him, though I detested being in his power—had he not suddenly said: ‘Ah, the Englishman wishes to

mock me. Very well. But reflect, my friend, that the ravishing Julia awaits you uneasily, and if you do not step forth I shall be forced to bind you in your frame, and send charming letters to Rosenheim, suggesting certain indelicate matters which . . . Did I detect a slight tensing of the lips, a slight. . . Ah, but you see! You see!

"My eyes sprang open—and I saw Wernicke step aside with a flourish—revealing to my sight a dim shabby room—and a crude desk—behind which sat a fat waxpale man—with great drooping mustaches—and heavilylidded eyes. Those expressionless eyes—staring directly into mine—appeared to alter for a moment—as if the pupils had changed size—though in all other respects the stranger remained impassive. I closed my eyes—troubled by that gaze—'Ah, ah, Englishman, come now, you cannot evade us,' cried Wernicke—and maddened by his wretched chirping—with a sudden motion I sat up—swung my legs over the painted bed—and emerged a moment later in my full human size—rather clumsily seated on the edge of a table—from which I straightway stepped to the floor. I stood looking with contemptuous hatred first at Wernicke—whose face displayed malice and fear—and then at the fat stranger—who remained repellently impassive—yet with a strange light in his eyes.

" 'Pray explain yourself at once,' I said to Wernicke, with my hand on my sword.

" 'Is he not sublime, the divine Ignotus? But do not excite yourself, *mon vieux*, it is bad for the heart.' With these words the trembling wretch withdrew a pistol from his waistcoat.

" 'Do you think I care for your despicable threats?' I remarked, and was about to draw my sword when the stranger said: 'Put down your pistol, fool. Lord Hall, pray forgive the unfortunate manner in which you were conducted to my humble abode. No harm whatever is intended to your person or, what is perhaps more precious, your pride. It is my intention to explain fully the mysterious processes of fate which in their blind wisdom have led you here. I am Stromboli. You have heard of me? Leave us.'

"This last remark was directed to Wernicke, who hesitated—thrust his pistol into his waistband—and exhibiting the better part of valor—stepped over to a small door that led to another room—and disappeared.

"Stromboli followed these farcical proceedings with an expression of melancholy boredom, and slowly returned his weary gaze to me.

" 'Milord, I will not insult you by trifling. Your secret is known. As chance would have it the discoverer was alone, but steps have been taken to ensure its spread, if you should be so rash as to run him through with your admirable rapier—is it Venetian? I propose to bury the secret, in return for a small favor. You shall have your freedom,

and your bride.'

"I loathed his smooth words with every fiber of my being—yet felt constrained to stand and listen—for the obscure threat in his words—touching my life's happiness—had their effect—and I dared not abandon the hope of seeing Julia—for the sake of sinking my blade into his gross guts.

"The small favor was soon explained. He proposed to display me—as a painting—upon the stage—asking only that I step forth from the frame at his bidding. He realized full well that a man of my temperament—spirit—sentiments—and sensibilities—would resist the idea of the stage as beneath his dignity. Nevertheless he wished to assure me—that there would be no slightest derogation of dignity. He himself could not consider the stage an indignity for an actor—and it was as an actor—and solely as an actor—that I should think of myself during this brief passage in my life. Was not all the world a stage? And were not all men players? He himself had often felt it to be so—and had been pleased as a boy to discover his thought expressed by the immortal poet of my nation. In any case my tour would take place far from Grünau—indeed outside the Empire if I preferred—in towns and villages to which no member of the German traveling classes had ever come. He urged me to consider his proposal carefully before reaching a decision.

"The smooth insolence of the man prevented me from laughing in his face—and I determined to kill him should he trouble me further. I dismissed his disgusting proposal with the contempt it deserved—turned on my heel—and strode to the main door—which proved to be bolted. When I turned round—with drawn sword—Stromboli sat looking at me with his terrible impassivity—yet with a touch of melancholy in his intelligent, corrupt eyes.

" 'Alas, Milord, you force me—against my inclination—to reveal the distressing hopelessness of your plight. Both doors are bolted. The window behind me is far too small to permit escape. You think of killing me—an admirable idea, in its way, and one to which I might in different circumstances lend encouragement—but what, pray, will it accomplish? Should you succeed, you remain imprisoned here—and entirely at the mercy of our mutual friend, who, I regret to say, does not wish you well. At my first cry he will be out in the street. Should you succeed in catching and killing him, you would only ensure what you wish to avoid: the spreading of your secret. Recollect as well, Milord, that it is only a matter of time before you will enter your—shall I say, home—again, whereupon you will be helpless, and entirely at the mercy of those who cannot appreciate you as I do. Far from wishing you harm, Milord, I offer myself as your protector—indeed, your servant. Milord, I did not ask to be born. Left to my own devices,

I should much have preferred to revel without intermission in the incomparable joys of nonexistence. Alas, it was not to be. Like the melancholy universe of the Catholics, I was summoned forth out of nothingness. One regrettable consequence of this misfortune is the lamentable necessity I find myself under, of earning a living. In return for your assistance in this lugubrious enterprise—assistance which I petition as a servant to his lord—I offer you a freedom of which I have no smallest desire to deprive you. You do not trust our friend, nor should you. But you need not fear him. He wishes only a certain sum of money, which I am willing to pay. I have in my possession facts of such a nature as to destroy his credibility and his existence, should he ever speak of you—and his cowardice is such that you will remain safe. One final point, Milord. Consider carefully whether pride—for we are speaking of pride, are we not, Milord—is more important to you than love, which cannot but be threatened by a rash decision on your part. Milord, consider well the words of Stromboli.’

“I abominated every syllable of his detestable claptrap—yet sensed that my only hope lay in transient acquiescence. It was repellently clear to me that I was a prisoner—for even if I should effect my escape—I knew not what steps had been taken to assure the spread of my secret. Worse—I knew not when I might be overcome by the hideous need to enter the picture—and dared not risk being bound and held beyond my wedding day. With such thoughts tumbling and tossing in me—I determined to accede for the moment—vowing to do nothing that might harm my life’s happiness.

“I turned to speak—and saw from Stromboli’s eyes that he understood he had won. I was forced to acknowledge in my crass captor a man of intelligence. Curious that we see chiefly stupidity or vapidity in fat faces. It is—rather—a physiological accident—distorting and disguising the patterns formed by tighter skin—in the expression of feeling. And yet after all—there remains something disagreeable—or disturbing—in the combined impression of fatness and intelligence—as if such intelligence must be sinister—concealing its true features in a cloak of grossness.

“Without a word Stromboli pushed before me a piece of paper and a quill.

“ ‘So, Stromboli—you wish me to sign away my soul?’

“ ‘Milord, your suspicions wound me. The devil is generally acknowledged to be of slender proportions, is he not? My own case argues, rather, an excess of the cherubic. I am your humble servant, and offer you the means to communicate with—whomever you wish.’

“A sort of shuddering admiration came over me, as I perceived the uncanny delicacy of my coarse jailer. He had reminded me of a duty that I myself had utterly forgotten—and in deference to my feelings—

had carefully refrained from mentioning Julia's name.

"I fell upon the paper greedily—pouring out my love for Julia—and begging her to believe me when I said—that only the most urgent business could prevent my immediate return.

"Without the slightest attempt to read my note, Stromboli placed it in an envelope—sealed it—and gave it to an armed servant who suddenly appeared from the room to which Wernicke had been banished. Instructing his man—who looked a precious brigand—to see that the note was delivered into the hands of Julia von Harnack—Schloss Rosenheim—Grünau—he straightway dismissed him—and with a grotesque bow left me to conclude his business with Wernicke—whose footsteps I soon heard descending a distant staircase.

"Stromboli returned forthwith, and without wasting words proceeded to reveal to me the manner in which my secret had been discovered. Wernicke—whose dislike to me was well known—had come to believe that I myself was the artistic prankster—and had hatched a plan whereby to catch me in the act. Apprised by von Harnack of my sudden departure—he had appeared that night at a soiree held by the Baroness—to which I myself had been invited. When the guests had departed for their upper rooms—he had remained in the drawing-room—concealed behind a curtain—and armed with a pistol. It was his intention to blackmail me—or whoever the witty malefactor should prove to be. He had been elated to see me come into the room—had waited patiently—and seeing me enter the picture—had at once decided that his secret was worth a fortune. Removing the picture—binding it—and dispatching a message to his old acquaintance Stromboli—he had set out for Stuttgart.

"Such then was the origin of my strange association with the Great Stromboli. He was a minor conjurer and traveling showman of a faintly unsavory kind—born in Genoa—or so he said—of a poor woman seduced and abandoned by an Austrian officer. His real name was Giovanni Strassmeyer. He had dabbled in a little of this—and a little of that—and a little of everything else—and having failed to impress the world with his talents—considered his genius not justly appreciated. He had a thorough knowledge of the science of physiognomy—differing in important respects from the system set forth by Lavater in his *Physiognomische Fragmente*—and claimed to have penetrated the secrets of animal magnetism while Mesmer was still curing catarrhs. He called himself a student of optical illusion—a scientist of the imagination—wasting his genius (a word of which he was excessively fond) before audiences too crude to understand him. In the shabby rented halls of provincial towns—dressed in a black cape—and flourishing a wand—the Great Stromboli would produce a cannonball out of a tophat—cause a scantily clad woman seated in a

chair to disappear behind his cape—and remove coins from the ears of astonished spectators. He was a ventriloquist—had once been a member of a theatrical troupe—and was not above performing on the musical glasses—or reading fortunes in a preposterous crystal ball.

“All this he reported in melancholy tones, as we traveled in a closed carriage toward a destination unknown to me. He questioned me closely about my powers—asking whether I could enter and emerge at will—to which I could but reply I did not know—and despite my detestation of it all I confess I was obscurely comforted. For although Strassmeyer looked upon me quite frankly as a means of enriching himself—and of gaining the notoriety that had so unaccountably eluded him during a life rich in unmerited disappointments—yet he accepted my monstrosity without a qualm—without a tremor—quite as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Perhaps he thought of me as another brilliant trick of that clever conjurer, Nature. The Great Stromboli had seen so much of the world—that nothing whatever surprised or disillusioned him—and indeed he was something of a philosopher in his way—maintaining that Nature was far less certain than many a student—of the line between the animate and inanimate. Had not the immortal Leibniz stated that the universe was alive in every part? Had not Kepler himself written—in *Harmonice Mundi*—that the earth was a living being—with a soul? Stromboli rejected the attack on spontaneous generation by the linen draper of Delft—surely I had heard of the notorious Leeuwenhoek—and by that recent mouthpiece of the anti-spontaneist party, Lazzaro Spallanzani. Was not the authority of Aristotle sufficient to bury these fashionable dogmas of the modern school? Did not the discoverer of carbon dioxide—the noted physicist Van Helmont—he who had distinguished the gases from the liquids and the solids—report the generation of mice from a mixture of damp flour and soot? Had not the great naturalist Athanasius Kircher written—in his *Subterranean World*—that he had bred living flies from dead ones—by soaking the dead flies with honey-water—and placing them on a copper plate exposed to the heat of ashes? Who then could say certainly—who could assert dogmatically—that there existed a hard and fast line between the painted portrait—and the living man?

“So spoke the Great Stromboli, in his melancholy impassive way—like one who had so little faith in the claims of his fellow men—that the wildest speculations had come to seem to him no less plausible than the solidest reasonings—for he had passed beyond the passion of cynicism—into a condition of indifferent contemplation. To all this I listened distrustfully—yet with fascination. And with growing distaste I recognized certain similarities between us. He too was in a manner torn between two worlds—the world of illusion, and the world of his

shabby reality—and he too—ah, he too—had chosen to pass through life under the black mask of a pseudonym.

"I shan't describe more than my first appearance in public, for they were all alike. In a small room above a waxwork museum—upon a scrubby stage supplied with a faded velvet curtain—the Great Stromboli produced an egg from a red foulard—removed from his mouth a strip of colored silk handkerchiefs eighty feet long—and lifted a flat tablecloth to reveal an empty porcelain bowl—from which in turn he removed a live rabbit. Next holding his cape before a sturdy table—he uttered a magic formula—and withdrew the cape to reveal that the table had disappeared. He then invited members of the audience onto the stage—and astonished them one and all by reciting the messages they scribbled and placed in a small black box. His last act opened with a pretty little speech—in which he declared that the deepest secrets of Nature had been revealed to him—and to him alone. Never before had a conjurer been able to summon life from inanimate matter. He thereupon displayed a table—entirely covered with a black velvet cloth—beneath which stood a bulky, squarish shape. Removing the cloth carefully, he revealed a painting resting upright against two sticks. He wheeled the table round in a complete circle—displaying to even the most disbelieving eye—that nothing lay concealed behind the painting. He next asked for absolute silence—the slightest cough sufficing to ruin everything—for he required an inconceivably intense concentration of his mental and spiritual faculties—if he were to accomplish his dread purpose.

"The hall fell into a tense and restless hush. The Great Stromboli fixed his concentrated gaze upon the painting—one imagined the veins standing out upon the great dome of his glistening forehead—and in the hall one could feel the skin of expectancy stretch tighter and tighter—till at the very instant it was about to burst—I on my bed opened my eyes. A gasp sounded from a few spectators in the front rows. Stromboli looked directly into my eyes—and as if I were compelled by that gaze—I sat up in bed—swung my legs over the side—and stepped forth from the frame directly onto the floor—where I stood grimly before a gasping audience—some of whose faces were tense with fear. But at length someone began to applaud—cries went up—one felt the general relief—for it was only a splendid conjuring trick—and not a devil's spell. Upon a word from the Great Stromboli I turned—stepped back to the table—and pulled myself into the picture. The performance was over.

"You may wonder why—as I stood before those gaping faces—repelled by the signs of crude and stupid amazement—I did not make my escape. You may be certain that more than once I wondered at it myself. My immediate care was the preservation of my secret—whose

safety was assured only if I remained in the good graces of Strassmeyer. This of course necessitated that I take him at his word—and I confess I did—for did we not understand each other—he and I? In addition I knew that I should never rest secure without the painting—to which I would one day be forced to return—and always Stromboli stood beside it—watching it carefully with his impassive and obscurely threatening gaze. Yet there was I believe a deeper reason—a darker reason—though I scarcely acknowledged it at the time. For something in the man held me. He knew my hideous secret—yet accepted my monstrous nature as if it were no more remarkable than the cut of my coat—and in my guilt and self-loathing—I felt soothed by his indifference. I had written my passionate letter to Julia, and felt free of immediate disaster. I was willing enough to serve Stromboli, for a time. No—more—I wanted him to succeed—for it was as if—can you see it—his success in imposing his spurious genius upon the miserable mob—were in some distorted fashion my own.

“Is the soul of man known? Is it all sunny and bright? Even your undivided kind have their labyrinthine darkness—how much more so we—who are neither one thing nor another—save only damned. Perhaps I secretly feared my return to Julia—whom I desperately loved—since her pure presence tortured me—tortured me I tell you—whereas Stromboli’s frank turpitude—soothed and consoled me.

“That first night, half the hall had been filled; the second night, people paid to stand in the aisles. Never within human memory had a conjurer produced such an illusion. Now Stromboli—for all his faults—was a shrewd student of human nature—and though he talked to the crowd about the dark mysteries of the universe—the secrets of Nature—and cant of that kind—pretending to summon me to life from inanimate paint—he was nevertheless careful to provide them with material objects—as the table beneath the painting—and the frame which he tapped to demonstrate its lack of artifice—by means of which they might explain the extraordinary performance. There must be a man hidden in the table—so went the general opinion—and the frame must contain a device by which the optical illusion was produced. Thus were the spectators provided with a *frisson* of terror—while at the same time their secret dread was soothed away—by mechanical explanations carefully arranged for them by the obliging conjurer.

“We passed from town to town—in southern Switzerland—in Savoy—in Parma—in Venetia—and everywhere our success was *éclatant*. Stromboli began to avoid the villages and smaller towns—searching always for larger halls—which he was entirely successful in filling. He added several tricks to his repertoire, but they were all merely a prelude to *Das Zauberbild*—or *La Pittura Magica*. One night—before a large engagement—he asked me whether I should be willing

to oblige him by introducing a small variation in my act. He wished me—before reentering the picture—to effect some slight change in my attire—so that when I reappeared in the picture I should be visibly different. I complied by assuming a cravat. This minuscule change drew a great deal of attention in the local press—for it disturbed a certain theory of optical illusion that had grown fashionable—while at the same time encouraging further speculations of the same general kind. I had by this time discovered—as you doubtless have surmised—that I was able to enter the picture at will—and once there—might be awakened to consciousness in the paint—by some sign from the outer world—as a light shining on my eyelids—or breath against my cheek.

“So we continued to increasing notoriety and acclaim—an acclaim that I watched with no small concern—for I was ambitious of obscurity. Stromboli was grateful to me—and used me with every courtesy—yet he requested—in his melancholy fashion—that for his own peace of mind I sleep in the picture—which he kept locked in a drawer at night. I acceded to this odd request all the more willingly in that he permitted me to wear my sword in his presence—as if granting me the right to kill him so long as he was awake. For that matter my sword was but a kind of mask—for I was prepared to barter it for some advantage—seeing that I wore concealed in my waistcoat—a fine French dagger. For though I trusted him—yet I distrusted him—and kept myself hidden away. So the days passed—and always the Great Stromboli grew rich.

“At the end of six weeks I reminded him that I must soon return to Julia—our wedding day being but six weeks distant. Stromboli was disturbed. Great possibilities were looming—did I mean to abandon him now, at the very threshold of success? With melancholy emphasis he reminded me—that although I had generously served him for six weeks—yet the first three had been passed in paltry towns—in petty halls—before inconsiderable audiences. He understood entirely my desire to return to my bride. But he begged to be permitted to point out—that having already consented to an absence of six weeks—I could scarcely profess to believe that an additional week or two would prove fatal to my hopes—so that without injuring my own cause—I should greatly be serving his—all the more so in that he soon hoped to open in Genoa and Milan.

“Now it is true that I was in Stromboli’s power—for he possessed my secret, and the unknown means by which to ensure its spread—should I disobey or destroy him. But it is also true that he was to some extent in my power as well. The Great Stromboli knew to a certainty that without me he was but a shabby scabby conjurer—condemned to dismal appearances in rural towns and villages—and he was shrewd

enough to realize—that should he threaten me too crudely—or push me too far—I would refuse to obey him—suffering the worst consequences rather than subject myself to humiliation. In his own way too—this will I say for him—he was fond of me—for he was quite alone in the world—and sensed our terrible kinship. Therefore he did not demand the additional weeks—but asked them as a favor of me—gazing at me like a melancholy organ-grinder about to be dispossessed of his monkey.

“Ah, he knew me too well, the Great Stromboli! I consented—resolving that I would not stay a day—not an hour—not the tenth part of a second—beyond the uttermost limit of four weeks. At the expiration of that date there would yet remain a fortnight in which to return to Julia—assure her of my love—and make preparations for our wedding. I now sat myself down to write Julia a second letter—but halfway through felt suddenly dissatisfied—and tearing it up—dashed off a short note—wherein I spoke of an unforeseeable delay—assuring her of my departure for Grünau within the month.

9. The Last Performance

“So began the final weeks of my brilliant career upon the stage. Stromboli worked feverishly—giving two and sometimes three performances daily—and the applause that greeted my stepping forth—daily grew louder. Females in the audience doted on the handsome painted lord—and once when a bouquet of roses was thrown to me—and withdrawing a single flower I tossed it back with a bow—the audience rose to a man—and to a wife—and thunderously applauded—aye, thunderclapped. Once a pretty girl with feverish eyes leaped upon the stage—and attempted to touch me—but Stromboli at once interposing himself—led her firmly away. Something in her walk—or the carriage of her shoulders—reminded me of Julia—and I felt a knife twisting in my vitals. Julia! At the thought of her it seemed madness to remain another hour. I saw her as she was—that night of the wild ride—laughing—eyes flashing—hair blowing about her—and it was as if my present life were a dream—an evil dream—from which I was struggling to awake. At such moments I could scarcely understand how I had fallen into this detestable way of life. But in the darkness of the night—as we traveled by coach to yet another town—I looked into my wretched and divided mind—and saw that although I longed desperately for Julia—yet I knew that with her must commence my life of concealment—whereas the despicable and clownish life I led with Stromboli permitted me—by its very nature—to confess the hideous truth of my being.

"If we have a soul—we who are nothing—my soul was in peril in that hour. For at the thought of Julia—my desperately beloved—a darkness came over me—and I longed to hide from her—in the shadow of Stromboli.

"As the third week drew to a close—and the moment of departure began to draw near—I seemed to detect a change in my gentle jailer. Stromboli fell into fits of deep melancholy—grew suddenly impatient and irritable—wished often to be alone. At times he would look at me a certain way—or rather—his eyes would meet mine, and slowly slide away—and directly I would be on guard, fearing—I knew not what. Save for this, his manner to me was scarcely different—yet he gave the impression of a man cloaking a secret trouble. He had talked openly with me before—and this new hiddenness—mimicking my own—vexed and disturbed me. I grew suspicious—and mindful of sword and dagger—vowed that neither man nor devil would prevent me from leaving at the expiration of the fourth week—though it were necessary to plunge my blade into Stromboli's treacherous heart. At these wild thoughts I urged calmness upon my soul—telling myself that in my longing to be reunited with Julia—and in my secret vacillation—I was subject to the delusions of an overexcited fancy. And always the crowds came—and the applause grew louder.

"Now as I studied Stromboli with sharpened senses—he gazed furtively back at me—as if trying to divine my inmost thoughts. At times I had the troubling sensation—that he wished me to decide—of my own free choosing—to remain with him forever. Then did I feel a coldness about the heart—as if I had given myself to the devil—and I longed for Julia—I longed to be human and whole.

"So I vacillated, and Stromboli stood like a dark shadow, hidden and watching.

"It was during this watchful and uneasy period—that Stromboli one memorable day—asked me with much coughing and damnable throat-clearing—to relinquish my sword—the daily sight of which he said had begun to trouble his sleep. I hesitated but a moment—and laughing aloud—handed him sword and scabbard with a bow. He gazed at me strangely as he took them from me—for he too seemed to be enduring an inward struggle—like one trying to overcome a temptation—or in the throes of a momentous decision.

"One day towards the middle of the fourth week—upon opening my eyes—I became aware of dark stripes—which for the moment I could not understand. Even as I sat up and began to step forth from the painting, I realized that the stripes were the bars of a cage. Bits of straw were scattered on the wooden floor—thick posts painted bright red and yellow stood at all four corners. The painting stood upright on a small table at one end of the cage—which I recognized to be a circus

wagon of the sort used to contain a tiger. I now caught sight of Stromboli, who had been watching me closely. 'Forgive me, Milord, for not informing you beforehand. It is a little innovation for the crowd, who are so easily bored and crave continual change. And it is for your protection as well, Milord'—this last referring to the incident of the girl on the stage. His eyes slid away as he spoke—the air of attempted lightness failed utterly. 'And so, Stromboli—you have decided to betray me?' At my harsh words his face showed pain, and I saw that he did not yet know he had betrayed me. 'Ah, Milord, Milord,' he said, and appeared melancholy. I chose to say no more—for if he had locked me in a cage—he had become crude—he had lost his way into my nature—he had ceased to be Stromboli.

"Thus was I wheeled out upon the stage in my brightly painted circus wagon—and stepped forth from the picture to tumultuous applause. What imported it to me—whether the cage that bound me was of actual iron—or of my own inner devising? Yet even now I hoped he would release me—for though he had locked me in a cage—yet he was my only friend. On the final day of the fourth week I said: 'Stromboli! I have served my term. Tomorrow I return to my bride.' 'Ah, Milord, Milord,' said he, 'what is another week? You will leave me forever—one more week is nothing, Milord.' He did not request it of me—did not look at me. I saw that I was in peril—and determined to effect my escape at all hazards.

"Now though I loathed and despised him for his treachery—and banished him forever from my heart—yet even so I was secretly grateful to him—for had he not betrayed me—should I have found the strength to leave him? No—more—in the depths of my vacillating heart—had I not foreseen his betrayal—and by my own actions—encouraged it? I asked these questions—and cast them coldly from me—for Stromboli was no more.

"Yet even as I devised my revenge I knew that his corruption had come upon him unawares. For Stromboli—unable to be Great without me—and desperate to remain in the public eye—had deluded himself into a slow half-knowing sort of betrayal—and in the manner of a ripening peach—had grown gradually rotten—so that he could no longer tell where the lushness of his need had passed into putridity.

"The floor of the cage was of wood, and whenever I was left alone I attacked it stealthily with my dagger. My first thought was to carve an opening in the floor—which however proving exceedingly thick—resisted my most desperate efforts—and after a long night of labor I lay panting with exhaustion—having barely completed the shallow outline of a circle. I became fretful—impatient—and coldly enraged. Cursing myself for my detestable wavering—and vowing to cut out my heart sooner than suffer defeat—I searched incessantly for a means

of escape—for I felt that if I should fail to return in time for my wedding—my life was blasted forever. With furious composure I explored every inch of that diabolical wagon. The four cornerposts were of wood—but so thick that my dagger could scarce make an impression—and the great padlock on the iron door proved resistant to every effort at prying. I returned to my floor—but soon felt the terrible hopelessness of it—and was about to sink into despair—when I discovered that the iron bars hemming me in—were set directly into the wood of the floor. I now determined to cut away the wood around two of these bars—detaching them from their base—and permitting me sufficient space through which to pass. With fanatical patience I cut and scraped away in the night—always discouraged by my pestilent small progress—yet leaping to the task with desperate eagerness the following night. Stromboli avoided my eyes—nor did he speak to me except upon the stage—where I performed with a cold contemptuous obedience—determined to provide no pretext for being watched.

“Patiently—feverishly—I cut down into that hateful wood—stopping abruptly when I heard the slightest sound. The blade kept bending—and threatening to break—and I forced myself to go more slowly—sharpening the blunted edges slowly against the bars—muffling the grate and grind as well as I was able. My fingers were scraped raw by the action of the knife—I barely slept—my life seemed to pass in a waking dream. I felt I was becoming ill—and growing frightened—forced myself to rest. Yet always I returned to the task—no longer mindful of the days and nights—barely knowing how many days remained. Slowly one bar loosened, and then the next. A new disappointment: though they were loose, I could not swing them away—or pull them out—but saw that I must cut a path to the very edge. So the nights passed—I lost track of time—and always I was at work—half mad with suppression and restlessness.

“The final performance of the Magic Picture was a triumph of the showman’s art. The Great Stromboli—dressed in his flowing black cape—was radiant with success. He had performed his lengthening number of conjurer’s tricks—a trifle clumsy, perhaps, in the matter of the disappearing dove—but the audience were respectful—knowing full well that it was all but a prelude to as prodigious a piece of conjuring as the panting age should ever hope to gape at. In due time the circus wagon came clattering out—covered entirely by a brilliant blue curtain spangled with stars. At the lifting of the conjurer’s hand, the curtain obediently drew itself aside. In the cage was nothing but a small table upon which rested the picture of a sleeping man. The curtain in the back now being opened—the wagon began to turn slowly upon the stage—revealing to the most searching gaze that nothing was concealed behind the upright picture—supported only by

a simple stand.

"When the wagon had completed its circle, the Great Stromboli stood before it—and with his mountain of flesh half-turned to the audience—demanded absolute silence. Staring at the picture—which glowed darkly in the light of nearby lanterns—he appeared to be driving his will into the paint. Spectators in the front rows could see the veins standing out in the great, domed forehead. Slowly in the painting a motion was visible. A whispering began—was instantly hushed. The figure in the painting had opened its eyes, and was staring at the Great Stromboli. For a long while they remained fixed in each other's gaze—in what appeared to be a terrific battle of wills. Moisture gleamed on the conjurer's broad brow—he seemed to be trembling with the effort. Then slowly—and with great deliberation—never removing his eyes from the eyes of his master—the figure in the painting sat up. Slowly the painted man swung his painted legs over the side of the bed. And now arrived the moment that all had waited for—the famous moment of the stepping forth. And again it happened—again the man stood on the floor—no longer a painting but a handsome English lord—of proud and disdainful bearing. Women in the audience were heard to sigh. Still with his eyes locked in those of his master—he took several steps forward—until he was standing at the bars of his cage. Never for a moment did their eyes cease to meet. And at length the Great Stromboli raised his arm—as he had done on so many evenings—in so many towns—upon so many rented stages—the well-known gesture that compelled the magic man back into his frame.

"But now something quite unprecedented occurred. For the man—instead of turning obediently away—continued to stand at the bars of his cage—staring strangely at the Great Stromboli—whose arm remained raised in ineffectual command. A murmur began in the audience—succeeded by a hush. The man was seen to grip the bars of his cage with his white, aristocratic hands. And still they stood there—the Great Stromboli and the Magic Man—locked in their terrible stare. Then it was that a most extraordinary event ensued, which no one present would ever forget. For with a sudden motion the man pushed at the bars—which wrenched loose at the bottom—and drawing a dagger he sprang onto the stage.

"I was barely aware of the spectators—that dark sea of fools—for I had eyes only for Strassmeyer. Taken unawares, he had stepped back at my leap—but made no effort to escape. Never did he remove his eyes from mine—and after the first moment of surprise and anger—he stared at me with a profound and gentle melancholy—as who should say: ah, Milord, why hast thou forsaken me? It was now that Giovanni Strassmeyer—that stupendous humbug—rose to his one moment of

greatness. Sensing the crowd's unrest—for some were already on their feet—he cried aloud—in his booming showman's voice—'Ladies and gentlemen! The Great Stromboli is honored to present to you: the Greatest Spectacle on Earth!'

"As he spoke, he raised an arm slowly and gracefully—seeming by the gesture to beckon me to do his bidding—and exposing his fat neck.

"I hesitated but a moment—and taking two brisk steps forward—plunged my dagger into his throat.

"A thunderous ovation erupted. I turned to the crowd, as if I had not noticed them before. 'Bravo! Bravo!' they cried. Bright-red blood gushed from Stromboli's wound—and standing there—like some wretch posing for a painting—he clutched the dagger as though to extract it—but hadn't the strength. He sat down suddenly—like a boy on a floor. Shouts and applause! I sprang back into the cage—snatched up the painting—leaped back to the stage—looked desperately about—and as the Great Stromboli slumped forward slowly—taking his final bow—I sprang to the wings in a tumult of applause. A startled stagehand—sitting on a stool with his head against a pasteboard mountain—opened his mouth as I rushed past. At the end of a narrow corridor four steps covered in red velvet led down to a door. I flung open the door and emerged in the chill night air of a narrow cobbled lane.

10. St. Ursula

"I walked briskly, not looking back. I turned onto a wider street—where seeing a hackney cab—I climbed in—shouted an order—and at the crack of a whip was off. At the posting-inn I changed to a chaise and at once set off again. It was the first of many coaches I feverishly traveled in, by day and by night—my few gold pieces sufficing as I made my way through Lombardy—and over the Alps—to Interlaken—Zurich—Schaffhau-sen—into the darkness and mists of Das Heilige Romische Reich. I slept and woke, slept and woke—sometimes it was night—sometimes day—being feverish I scarcely took note—and we dashed through a succession of small towns—which all seemed the same town—till crossing a number of rivers—and rattling through forests—we came at last to the gates of Grünau. With my last gold piece, I paid the coachman to take me to my chambers. The door was opened—after an unconscionable delay—by a drunken servant out of livery. He looked at me in stupefied fear as I stormed past him into the library, where empty madeira bottles lay about. I concealed the damnable portrait behind a velvet curtain before ascending to my bedchamber. There I found my drunken footman in bed with the

chambermaid—told him to put his whore in his own bed—and threatened him with horsewhipping if he did not at once prepare my carriage. The two stumbled away—she wailing and clutching a bedsheet to conceal her charms—he hopping on one foot among empty hock bottles as he struggled into his breeches. I sat on the bed and held my burning head in my hands before descending to my waiting carriage. I flung myself in and soon was dashing behind a brace of bays toward Schloss Rosenheim.

“At the door a servant whom I recognized eyed me with insolent suspicion. I presented my card—he looked up in astonishment—and as I pushed past him into the drawing-room—he blurted out that Fraulein Julia was no longer at Rosenheim. ‘Get me the Countess!’ I cried. He replied that the Countess had returned to Dresden. ‘I must see Julia at once. Where is she, damn you?’ At this the jackanapes appeared to hesitate, and I took a menacing step towards him. ‘Why, Milord, she—you cannot see her, it is no longer—’ ‘Can’t see her? I’ll tear out the tongue of any man who says so. We’re to be married, you fool!’ ‘But Milord—Fräulein Julia has taken a holy vow—retired to a convent—your wedding day was two days ago . . .’ I felt the room spinning about me—I know not what I said—for in my heart I knew I had lost my life’s happiness. At length: ‘Von Harnack then! Or has he too vanished away?’ ‘His lordship has gone hunting. Have you not heard, Milord? The French army . . .’

“And now in a doorway a dim shape appeared—moving slowly forward through the late-afternoon gloom. I had seen the irascible old Margrave but once before. He walked stiffly upright—with an effort so great to keep from bending forward an inch—that his face was tense with pain. His white hair was *en brosse* and his handsome white mustachios extended in perfect curves beyond the edges of his cheeks. He came up before me—where he stood gazing at me with his fierce blue eyes—and slowly and with great difficulty began to raise an arm. For a moment I wondered whether the old devil was attempting a salute. But when his arm had reached his shoulder—he slowly contracted his hand into a fist—and feebly shaking that pale fist at me—he said in a barely audible voice: ‘We have won! Infidel!’ Had he been somewhat less moribund I would have knocked him senseless. Instead I bowed coldly—fixing him with a look of contempt—and turned on my heel.

“Though ill with fever I set out posthaste for Dresden—a three days’ journey. When I arrived at Schloss Rebensberg I was told the Countess could not see me. As this message was being delivered the Countess herself appeared. I recognized her at once, though she had changed horribly—she seemed ten years older, and her fine, light gait had changed to the weary walk of a woman who no longer cares how

she appears to a man. She asked me into a darkened sitting room—though a fine autumn sun was shining, the curtains were drawn across the windows—and in this melancholy chamber—where all seemed to be desiccated and faded—she told me in a flat and weary voice—the little there was to tell. The news of my second departure—without a word of preparation or explanation—had devastated Julia. She had fallen ill under the blow—and even after her recovery, never left Rosenheim. It was with the greatest difficulty that she could be persuaded to leave her chambers for a stroll in the open air. Daily the Countess sought to rouse her spirits by assuring her that my absence was necessary—but the feeling of abandonment had struck too deep—though Julia never complained, never blamed me at all.

“The Countess too had been *bouleversée* by my departure—though she strove to conceal her uneasiness from Julia—arguing that since Ignotus had returned once—he would certainly return again. But this proved to be a dangerous argument—for Julia clung to it all too hopefully in the first several days—and when my absence was prolonged a day—two days—a week—a fortnight beyond the time of my first absence—she fell prey to the fear that I had abandoned her forever. Rumors had reached her—even the first time—of an old love that had called me away—and though at the time she had dismissed them with contempt—she now was haunted by that fear. My silence tormented her. For I learned from the Countess that Julia had received no letters from me—not a syllable. Whether it was Stromboli who had betrayed me—or his wretched servant—or whether it was the state of the collapsing Empire—I do not know. The Countess too was tormented by my silence, for she recalled my hints of a former love. To make matters worse, my precipitate flight had turned the Margrave decidedly against me. The old rascal now declared—that although he had been prepared to overlook heresy in a son-in-law—he would not for a moment tolerate ill-breeding. The Countess might have argued him round, had not von Harnack himself—who had been disturbed less by my decampment per se than by the concurrent absence of the painting—for there was talk I had stolen it—had not my devoted brother, I say, sided with his father on the fourteenth day.

“Their opposition to the marriage had upon Julia the effect of driving her to a passionate defense of me—and making her declare—that if she did not marry me—she would marry no one—but would devote her life to chastity and God. And she declared—as she might not have done, but for the enraged opposition of brother and father—that she would wait for me until the last hour of our wedding day—and if I did not then appear—and marry her—she would leave at midnight for the Convent of St. Ursula—a stony fortress situated on a bleak hillside in southern Württemberg. And so she had waited, day

after day—and as she grew thinner and paler—her eyes seemed to blaze with the ardor of her love. For she had put her fate in the hands of God. The Countess had been troubled by Julia's vow—for though an ardent Catholic herself—she had always felt secretly repelled by the idea of women living their lives in a convent—shut away from God's world—and denying their nature. Did not the blessed Mary herself have a husband? But her attempts to dissuade Julia from her fixed purpose met with no more success than the attempts of the Margrave to dissuade her from marrying an English lord—and indeed a slight coolness now sprang up between the aunt and the niece. And as Julia became more ardent with each passing day—so the Countess felt the life flowing out of her—for now as well as vexing herself about me—she grieved over Julia's cold future.

“On the morning of her wedding day Julia sat before her window, looking out over the great lawn and the carriage path. She remained there throughout the day, attended by the Countess. Never once did she mention my name. Shortly before midnight she gave orders for her carriage to be prepared and her boxes carried down—all this in a dreamy, strange state. The Countess remembered her faint and almost peaceful smile. Her eyes were full—her cheeks hollow—she had already begun to resemble a saint. At the first stroke of twelve she sat transfixed—as if turned to stone. At the final stroke she rose swiftly and embraced the Countess. Then she went out to the carriage—the Margrave, who retired each night at precisely eleven, had refused to see her—and taking her final leave of the Countess she set off. She was dressed in black, and wore a black veil over her tired pale face. She rode off without a word—looking, said the Countess—like a bride of death. The Countess left Rosenheim the next day. Waking that morning, she had felt a pressure on her chest; she had thought she must be ill, but later diagnosed her condition as a broken heart. Now she had no desire to leave her chateau—and when I was announced she had felt at first only a vague desire to send me away—for I was a ghost out of the far past. But then she had decided to see me—for she had never believed in ghosts. It was useless for me to attempt to see Julia. No one was permitted beyond the outer walls of St. Ursula—the vow of silence being final and eternal. And now the Countess enquired—in an oddly flat, indifferent way—why I had come back—and why I had gone away—looking at me with a sort of curiosity—as if she could not quite remember me, or understand who I was.

“And in that faded chamber—thick with regrets and the odor of dying roses—I bared my soul to the Countess. I revealed my birth in the paint—my early days in Grünau—my love for Julia—my call back to the frame—my shame, my humiliation—my life with Stromboli—my escape—my return. I told her everything—everything—in that

atmosphere of faded hopes and lingering memories—glowing like dying embers—and when I stopped—the Countess looked away sadly—almost with embarrassment. For of course she hadn't believed a word of it—my fantastic tale. To her it must have seemed the passionate lie of a tainted soul. But at last she sighed, saying, 'What does it matter, Ignotus, after all?'—and looked at me almost with affection—as if my attempt to apologize had revealed some goodness in me after all. I did not care, I was too weary and brokenhearted to care. She soon lapsed into listlessness. I rose to take my leave—we spoke vaguely of meeting again—both knowing it would not happen. And I left that darkened room—stepping out into the shocking sunshine of a radiant autumn day.

"Despite my weariness and illness I set out at once for the Convent of St. Ursula. I recall nothing of the wretched trip save feverish glimpses of forests and village rooftops. At the convent I was refused an audience with Julia. The mother superior—a handsome woman with disturbingly pale skin—told me that Julia would not be informed of my visit. She looked at me with concern and enquired whether I were ill. 'Dead,' I replied—regretting my flippancy at the sight of her flush. 'I will pray for you,' she said. I returned to my carriage—spent a feverish night at an inn—where I dreamed of Stromboli with that damnable knife stuck in his neck—walking arm in arm with the Countess in the garden of Rosenheim. I set out the next day for Grünau—arriving many days later in a state of near collapse. I took to my bed—longing for oblivion—but doomed to live.

11. Felix Brendel

"A minor wit in Grünau society—a failed playwright—used to say: 'A play ends, but life goes on, alas.' The next few years passed as in an evil dream. After my recovery I sank into a monotony of melancholy—utterly indifferent to the pleasures and dangers of the world. The world! The world was in upheaval—there was talk of an end to the Empire—but I cared nothing for it—I who was not of this world. General Bonaparte had already swallowed up the left bank of the Rhine—and if he swallowed up the right bank—and all Europe—and Charles's Wain as well—what was it to me? I greeted the idea of the destruction of Grünau not with the eagerness of one who longs for death—but with the apathy of one who wishes neither to live nor to die.

"I became a solitary—my favorite haunt my library—where I spent whole days studying works of natural history and philosophy—in a futile effort to murder boredom. My studies were frantic—fruitless

—and unremitting. Secretly, perhaps, I was already searching for a clue to my mystery. Thoughts of my lost happiness—my blasted life—my accursed fate—continued to torment me. A terrible restlessness grew, and at last the very solitude I had longed for was abhorrent to me. Detesting the scene of my ruin, I determined to travel. For nearly a year I moved from town to town—in Austria—in Bavaria—in Württemberg—in Switzerland—seeking distraction—and peace of soul. Weary at last—I returned to Grünau—and shut myself up in my library once again. I began to order arcane texts—to study dead languages—the deader the better—and always that insufferable restlessness—rubbing away at me like shoe-leather upon a corn. I set off again on my travels—with a fire in my skull—and ice in my heart—longing for I knew not what manner of adventure or oblivion. You may wonder that I did not pursue my betrayer—but the stale idea of revenge—now that Julia was lost—held no slightest attraction for me—and Wernicke's existence—or lack of it—was of no more consequence to me than the fate of Europe. I was ravaged by restlessness as by a wasting disease. My soul itched horribly. In foreign capitals I sought the company of the learned—but they were fools—who could hold forth for a fortnight on the Antediluvian language—the temperature of Hell—and the habits of cadavers on the Day of Judgment—but knew nothing of such creatures as I—the abominable. It was in this happy state—that one day on the shore of a gloomy Russian lake—an idea came to me—which quite took my breath away.

“For if my life was a burden—my suffering a travesty—my birth a monstrosity—who was to blame but him who had created me? Never before that moment had I thought to seek him—to demand an answer to the riddle of my tormented and preposterous existence. The idea once entering—gave me no peace—and I set out the following day on a long journey to the town of my birth—which I had not seen since the night of my escape.

“On a moonlit evening I drove through the same park I had fled through more than three years since. Nothing had changed, though empires were crumbling. Lanterns still hung from the linden trees—students clashed their steins at small tables—laughter and fiddle music filled the air. I was smote to the heart by those happy human sounds—for I was one forever cast out—of the human harmony. Beneath my greatcoat I felt the comforting solidity of a brace of pistols. I came out through the gate—and without hesitation—had my driver turn towards the direction of my first—hah! is it home? As we rattled slowly over the cobbles—along the wall of the park—I looked closely at the gabled stone dwellings across the way. They seemed much alike. Chancing to look up, I saw in a many-paned window a square of blue

glass.

"I halted the carriage and alighted in a state of great agitation. I had not until that moment thought of the strangeness of my errand. Would my sudden appearance alarm him? Should I have disguised myself? Well I remembered his horrified retreat before me. But an inner urgency impelling me forward—I stepped to the door of the respectable though somewhat neglected *bürgerlich* abode—and sounded the brass knocker. It was dark—but early—the light of candelabra shone in the windows of each story. The door opened—an elderly woman in a mob-cap looked at me with narrowed but admiring eyes. I apologized for disturbing her and enquired after the young painter who lived in the garret.

" 'Young painter? You must have the wrong house, sir. There's a young girl lives up there with her mother—both seamstresses. A nice pair, quiet, no trouble. May I ask your business? Oh, young painter—you must mean Herr Brendel. He lived here a few years ago, before his pictures began to sell. I've not seen hide nor hair of him since. I always thought that young man would come to no good. Well, I was wrong. Everyone buys his pictures now. I believe he lives on the other side of town.' "

"It proved not difficult to find Felix Brendel, though I did not succeed until late the following afternoon. I discovered his address by asking about in the coffeehouses—saying I wished to have my portrait painted. Brendel had his rooms in a fashionable part of town, on the Lindenallee. A servant opened—and I was ushered up a polished stairway—into a broad and high apartment hung with many portraits in costly frames. The pale light of the dying afternoon streamed through the high windows. On an easel—facing an empty chair—stood the incomplete portrait of a vague woman—whose fattish throat was encircled by three precisely painted strings of pearls. As I stood examining the portraits on one wall—most of which were of wealthy burghers and their wives—though a few baronesses and duchesses poked out here and there—a plump man came striding briskly into the room. I barely recognized him. He was dressed in the height of fashion—in a green tailcoat—red waistcoat—white nankeen trousers—and a ruffled silk shirt. His hair—carefully curled—gave off a rich smell of macassar oil—and glistened as if he had applied varnish to it. There was indeed something shiny and polished about him—as though he were a copy of himself being offered for sale. He had a round face and boyish features—shrewd eyes—an elderly paunch.

" 'Did you wish to make an appointment for a sitting?' he enquired—smiling but observing me closely. He laughed lightly, adding: 'Or did you wish to look over some of my poor things?'

" 'Do you not know who I am?' I said coldly.

"A look of genuine distress passed over his fatuous shrewd face. 'Alas, forgive me, Lord . . . Did we meet at the Duchess von Loewenthal's? I've been dashing about like a regular idiot these days and I have the most unfortunate habit of occasionally forgetting a name. And yet, I am rather good at faces . . .' Here he observed me keenly. It was evident that he never forgot a face or a name—for he was the sort who builds and strengthens a reputation—by recalling every boot he licks.

" 'It was several years ago,' I said, 'in another part of town.'

" 'Oh, that.' He raised his hand and made a little fluttering motion with his plump fingers. 'A melancholy episode in the life of a struggling artist. I rarely think of it, Lord . . .'

" 'Hall. And yet, in those days, you were something of a dreamer, were you not?'

" 'A dreamer? Yes, you may say so. One is young, one dreams, one does not know better. Every man his own Titian, so to speak. You knew me then? Frankly, Lord Hall, the memory of those days is somewhat painful to me. I have nothing but contempt for the artist who does not know the world. In those days I thought only of myself, never of the customer. But surely the purpose of art is to please? I considered myself a genius, wasting in a garret. But art is a craft, Lord Hall, not a form of self-indulgence. A beauty which pleases no eye but the artist's—can it be called Beauty at all? As a matter of fact I have just published a little treatise on this very subject. It took me quite some time to rid myself of my adolescent fervors. I lacked certain advantages. It was a struggle. But I made my way, by my own modest gifts. And I've not done too badly, all things considered.'

"At this point he removed a gold watch from his trouser pocket—glanced down at it with one uplifted eyebrow—and remarked: 'I should be delighted to continue our discussion but unfortunately I am expected for dinner at the Baroness von Hohenheim's. Did you say you wished to make an appointment for a sitting?'

" 'I wish, rather, to enquire about a portrait.'

" 'Indeed?' Here he measured me with a swift shrewd glance. 'Ah, I quite understand. The times are unstable. You will find my terms most reasonable. I am certain we can—'

" 'I refer to a portrait you painted at the melancholy time of your apprenticeship. Do you recall a painting entitled *Portrait of a Young Man*? The words were in English.'

" 'Let me see . . . *Portrait of a Young Man*, you say? Yes, in those days I was in the habit of giving titles to my works. I fastened on the plaques myself. French, English, and German. I have painted so many pictures, it is difficult to recall precisely . . .'

" 'A young man in a garret. Stretched out on a bed. Surely you

have not forgotten it?

"He frowned deeply and for a second time a look of distress passed over his face.

" 'Ah yes, that one. An unlucky painting—I've not thought about it for years. It gave me nightmares, that painting. I had to get rid of it. Couldn't have it about me. Sold it suddenly one day, to some art dealer or other. He had it for a song. Ach, I don't like to think of it. But I have many other paintings, much better, if you'd care to . . . '

" 'Pray try to recall that painting. How did you paint it? I must know.'

"Something in my manner appeared to startle him and he withdrew a step before replying.

" 'But I tell you, Lord Hall, I got rid of it. Did I speak of it at the time? I began to imagine things about it.'

" 'Yes, you spoke of visions . . . '

"He walked over to a window, where he leaned his arm on the embrasure. 'Yes, nightmares . . . whatever you call them. I had to get rid of it. That accursed picture! In those days I was still painting for myself, doing society portraits to keep the pot boiling. My own painting was all I cared about. I slaved over every feature, every—oh, in those days I would have said I poured my soul into it. Yes! I grew sick over that painting, I dreamed my dreams into it—young fool that I was. And what was the result? It haunted me, made me sick—I had to get rid of it. It was after that little episode that I realized my youthful dreams were ruining my mind. I gave up drink and dreams together. My society portraits improved rapidly. I have never spoken to anyone about this. But here, in this twilight, one almost feels . . . But good heavens, I really must not stand here chattering about the good old days, the Baroness is easily angered. You really must forgive me, Lord Hall. Was there anything else you wished to purchase?'

"What was the point of detaining him? What was the point of killing him? With a cold bow I took my leave. The portraits on display had all been slick and second-rate—no dreams there, you may be sure. Even as he spoke of his youth I knew I had not been the creation of genius. For genius—outrageous and daring genius—inventing its own laws—and disdaining all others—expresses itself completely within those laws. In this it is oddly like the second-rate talent—which likewise expresses itself completely within laws—but laws which are much-used and mediocre. Now when the second-rate seeks to exceed itself—when, still young and hopeful, it takes fire—but finding itself unable to invent new laws—looks about desperately for whatever lies ready to hand—may not this fiery spiritual excess—prevented by inherent dullness from assuming an original form—pour itself into the mold of the commonplace—and in so doing infect the mediocre with a

strange life? Is that the secret of my hideous birth? For it's never your Raphaels—your Titians—what have you—that step out of the frame—but only we accursed ones—spawn of fiery dullness and enraptured mediocrity.

“Wearily revolving such thoughts I returned to Grüнау. My story is nearly done. Back in my wretched rooms—utterly fatigued—yet incessantly restless—lost forever to Julia and to joy—unrecognized by my own creator—himself a fatuous mediocrity whom I would have turned from in disdain, had I met him in a salon—I determined, like many a poor devil before me, to put an end to it all. With the weapon intended for my creator, one night I put a bullet in my brain. The mockery of it! I woke to find myself back in the picture—still hidden behind the curtain. I stepped out—dusting myself off—for no one being permitted into the library it had grown devilish dusty—and realized that I was doomed to live—forever. For we are not of your kind, we accursed ones! I resumed my feverish and indifferent travels. One day—in an access of despair—I destroyed the picture. From that moment I was filled with a wild restlessness that gave me no peace. On a day—nearly a year later—coming to a ghastly ruin in a boring campagna—I stumbled over a stone and discovered a stairway. With curiosity—with indifference—I descended. So after long wandering in the upper Hell—I came to this place. My painting was on the wall. Traveler, my tale is done. Pray forgive the unconscionable babble of the most unfortunate creature who ever sighed for the bliss of oblivion. Grin at me, will you, Morpheus?—you devil—damn your eye—look at him—lying there like a debauched cherub—the hypocritical rogue. And so you've come down for a look at us, have you? I trust you find us edifying.”

This last remark was addressed to me with such cold contempt that I withdrew into hurt silence. During the telling of his tale I had come to feel a kinship with Ignotus, for I too in my fashion had never felt at home in the world. And that was curious, since I was a human creature. And I wondered whether, in my journey down to the realm of Morpheus, I had secretly been seeking for those to whom I might feel myself akin, in some manner. But as I looked across at Lord Hall sorrowing and raging in his chair, it was plain that the mere presence of a human creature filled him with such eruptive hatred that he could never, in any manner, accept me as his spiritual kin. So I sat shy and sullen there, restlessly waiting. Meanwhile we had fallen into an awkward silence—broken suddenly by a tremendous yawn from Morpheus. We both turned to look at him lying sprawled on the couch. His eyes opened: he was staring directly at Lord Hall. The great dark eyes widened in horror. Fixing Lord Hall with a terrified stare, Morpheus sat up slowly; and extending an arm with his palm out and

his fingers spread, he pressed back against the couch.

"What dread creature o' the night art thou, that thus dost fix me wi' thy mad inhuman eye? Art thou a thing o' flesh and blood? Speak, vision o' the mind-deceiving dark! Speak, fiend out of hell! Speak—or begone!"

Lord Hall stared fiercely at Morpheus. His nostrils flared, his eyes seemed to flame. All at once there erupted from his throat a single burst of harsh laughter, as if torn from him against his will.

"Vex me, will you? Why, you damned hypocrite—you blackened sepulcher—listening, were you?"

"Why, now methinks 'tis a sweet-faced fiend—a very angel of hell. What, Tom, is it thee? Thou didst give me such a start. For I did wake, and seem to see before my eyes a form most monstrous to behold, the which deceitful sleep had made me to fancy, did step forth from out a painting on a wall. Yet now do I see, 'tis but a sleepy lad with an empty bottle by his side."

"Empty as a blasted heart."

Morpheus burst into laughter. " 'Sdeath, I do love a sweet comparison. Then here's to thee, and thy blasted heart."

"Aye, mock on, and welcome."

"Why, so I shall, an thou speak to me o' blasted hearts before breakfast. 'Tis a sweet life, say what thou wilt."

" 'Tis a long life—confound thy villainous idiom."

A look of desolation passed across Morpheus' features. Suddenly his shoulders sagged: the breath seemed to go out of him. Wearily he sighed; and raising his mournful eyes he said:

"Hoot awa, mon, ye maunna be sae sharp wi' puir Morpheus. When a's dune I ken weel I gang an ill gate wi' my tongue. I'm nae sae young as ye, lad—sae muckle the waur for me!—yet I hae been thinking to mend mysell, for I ken weel there's nae sich thing in a' the warld as to speak true English like a weel born English laird. Why, ye dour deil, it brings the tears into my auld een, to hear ye speak sae fair! Aye, it's mony a lang year and mair syne I've heard the leek. Gude forgie me, I'm no a'thegither sae void o' sense that I dinna ken the clang o' reason. Then let there be nae bad blude between us, for as sure as ye live, what's gude aneuch for an English laird is gude aneuch for Morpheos."

A weary smile passed across Lord Hall's lips. "Pray don't defend yourself. It's I who deserve hanging."

"Why, so thou dost, thou villainous idiom, forwhy thou dost forget there's naught in empty words save what art and passion gives 'em. But come, Carl old snarl, 'tis time to be on our way, an thou wouldst see the wonders of these artful parts. Wouldst join us, Tom? Thou'rt welcome, lad."

"I shall spare you my infernal company. And I am rather tired now."

"Aye, thou wert always fond o' thy bed—is't not so, Milord?"

Morpheus stood up, looking with a moment's irritation at Lord Hall, who sat gloomily staring at the back of a hand. I rose, looked at Lord Hall, hesitated, and without a word walked over to Morpheus at the entrance to the little alcove. As I joined Morpheus, Lord Hall rose from his chair with weary grace and turning to me said:

"Pray excuse my abominable rudeness, but I am unfortunately one of the damned."

I did not know what to reply, for there was something cold and sorrowful in his bearing that prevented easy speech; and obeying a sudden impulse, I bowed from the waist.

Morpheus burst into laughter. I sprang up from my bow, expecting to see Lord Hall aflame with rage, and saw him staring at me intently. Suddenly he said: "But why did you come down to this place?"

At this an embarrassment came over me, and I wished he had spoken to me earlier, when Morpheus slept or feigned sleep.

"Oh . . . but that's a question I don't know how to answer. Sometimes I think I came down here just in order to be able to answer it. But when you were speaking earlier I thought: because I too feel cut off from—the human harmony."

Lord Hall glanced quickly at Morpheus and returned his gaze to me. "But you are—human, are you not?"

"Yes, I suppose I am. Human." The word hung awkwardly in the air, and a nervousness came over me, as if indeed I had lost my way.

"This is no place for him," Lord Hall said to Morpheus. And I felt more forlorn than ever, seeing them joined against me.

"'Sdeath, 'tis no place for anyone, Talking pictures! What next?"

"Where then?" I asked.

"Back."

"Back?"

"Among your kind."

"They're not my kind," I said with a bitterness that surprised me.

"Then indeed, sir, you are one of the damned." Lord Hall bowed lightly, as if to acknowledge a kinship, but there was a sense of faint mockery about it, as if he had already withdrawn into his apartness.

"Ho hum, methinks I'll hang myself and be one o' the damned. It hath a sweet ring to't. Prithee, who mayst thou be? Why, one o' the damned, an't please your honor. 'Sdeath, lads, stand not prating about damnation like a pair o' precious devils, for listening to you, I do gin to feel like one o' the damned."

Lord Hall stepped back and said coldly: "Farewell."

"Aye, and so I shall. Come, lad." Morpheus turned and strode out of the little room.

"Farewell," I said quietly, and followed Morpheus into the crowded hall. As we approached a doorway leading to another room I turned for a moment to look back at the faded armchairs, the dim oil lamps, the dark pictures glimmering on the walls: and I saw Ignotus standing gracefully in the frame of the alcove opening, leaning one shoulder against the wood, his arms crossed lightly, his dark eyes flashing in scorn and sorrow.

III. The Library of Morpheus



I found myself in what appeared to be a dimly lit library, stretching away on all sides and into the distance. It was not like any library I had ever seen. The wooden shelves did not extend in straight perspectives but meandered lazily, forming sinuous and alluring aisles that turned out of sight like forest paths. The shelves were irregular in height, ranging from about ten to fifteen feet, though occasionally soaring out of sight into the upper darkness. The aisles were dimly illuminated by small flames enclosed in cylinders of glass, attached to wooden pegs projecting from the vertical divisions between shelves. Here and there among the books occurred gaps of about six feet, and in most of these spaces a person lay upon a pillow, reading or sleeping. The air was filled with a soft sound of breathing and of pages gently turning. The shelf-people lay stretched out on their backs with their arms over their eyes, or their books held open upon their chests. Sometimes they leaned on an elbow as they read in the glow of the flaming shelf-lights, or lay on their stomachs with one arm dangling. And here and there among the books a couple lay entwined in a languorous embrace.

As we advanced in silence along a winding aisle, from which other winding aisles continually branched, I noticed that at intervals there extended from each shelf-edge a small horizontal grip or bar. These wooden grips rose above one another like a series of steps, and now and then I saw someone by this means ascending or descending to another shelf. I glanced at titles as we passed, but they were always unfamiliar. The aisles narrowed and widened as we advanced, sometimes coming so close together that it was necessary for us to squeeze sideways or even to stop and seek out another aisle; occasionally the highest shelves leaned toward one another at the top, forming picturesque archways. Sometimes, when aisles crossed, an open place like a plaza was formed. In one such place I saw a great tree with spreading leafy branches hung with lanterns, under which soft reading-chairs were disposed upon a carpet. In another place I saw a scattering of simple beds, where people lay reading, or lay fast asleep, their books open beside them.

As we continued along the hushed and winding aisles I stopped

from time to time to examine one of the strange volumes. One winding aisle contained books upon each of whose dark bindings was neither title nor author but only a Roman numeral. The volumes were in disorder and numbered in the thousands, although I was not certain what to make of barred numerals such as **CXVIII CCXLI**. I examined several of these volumes, which began with chapters having even higher Roman numerals. It seemed to be a vast connected story of some sort, with much attention to genealogy and the minutiae of social custom; a few dim black-and-white illustrations showed battles and voyages. The alien and unfamiliar quality of all these books did not excite my imagination but rather oppressed and irritated me, and it was not until I turned with Morpheus into still another aisle that I first felt a stirring of interest.

As soon as we turned the corner I detected familiar names on book-spines. We seemed to have come to a random section of classics, for I saw such names as Spenser, Dickens, Byron, Stendhal, Chaucer. With mild curiosity I took down a volume entitled SPENSER, VII-XII. Upon opening it, I saw that it contained Books VII-XII of *The Faerie Queene*. Nearby was a slim volume entitled DICKENS, which proved to contain the final chapters of *Edwin Drood*. I looked up in surprise and said: "But I thought *Edwin Drood*—" "Aye, lad: woefully unfinished, there in thy lax realm." Clearly pleased, he indicated three thick dusty volumes on another shelf; they contained, in closely printed double columns, Chaucer's completion of *The Canterbury Tales*. Leaning close to me, Morpheus whispered that the Miller's second and third tales were something of a disappointment but that his fourth tale was remarkable for its blend of the sublime and the obscene, though even that paled in comparison with the second appearance of the Pardoner; and the Epilogue was one of the high points in the history of English literature. Yet even as he was speaking he had already removed from the shelf a matching set in red leather, containing completions by Keats of *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*, respectively. Nearby stood a slender volume, in which I found the final chapter of *The Castle*, translated by Willa and Edwin Muir. Morpheus, moving along, pointed out Sir Walter Raleigh's completion of *The History of the World* and Gottfried von Strassburg's completion of *Tristan*. In quick succession he showed me Marlowe's completion of *Hero and Leander*, Flaubert's completion of *Bouvard et Pecuchet*, Byron's completion of *Don Juan*—Morpheus called the Italian cantos "a triumph"—and Stevenson's completion of *Weir of Hermiston*. The books seemed arranged in no particular order, and as Morpheus urged me forward I thumbed hastily through a number of completions, not all of whose titles I recognized: *Jean Santeuil*, *Kubla Khan*, *The Man Without Qualities*, *The Triumph of Life*, *The Legend of Good Women*, *Orlando Innamorato*,

Christabel, Lucien Leuwen, Sanditon, and Septimus Felton.

I turned now into the next winding aisle, where I saw several half-familiar names which I could not quite place. I had picked up a volume of poems by the vaguely familiar Jeffrey Aspern, and was reading one called "Venetian Impressions," when Morpheus handed me a slim volume by Tonio Kröger: bound in morocco and printed on fine paper, it bore the date 1899. I was still unable to grasp the nature of this section of the library, and my perplexity only grew when, happening to turn to the shelves across the aisle, I saw a great number of novels by David Copperfield. They bore such titles as *The Personal History and Adventures of Walter Worthington*, *The Life and Times of Edward Thrush*, *Little Em'ly*, *A Word to the Wise*, *Greymanse*, *Eugene Pemberton: Bart.*, *A Year and a Day*, *Agnes Foster*, *Is She Right?*, *Cora Broughton*, *The Lily and the Rose*, *The Chimney Corner*, *Once and for All*, *Wriothlesley Wold*, and *Lucy Dearheart*. "Why, look thee, blinking lad, canst not see? Here hast thou the works of all those sweet scribblers, whom scribblers in thy realm have wantonly imagined." And now among writers whose names I did not recognize I began to find familiar and less familiar ones, as well as odd, elusive names that hovered between the half-familiar and the unknown; and among the many writers of that aisle were Enoch Soames, Gustav von Aschenbach, Seamus Earwicker, Pierre Glendinning, Arthur Pendennis, Hugh Verecker, Stephen Dedalus, Edwin Mullhouse, Sebastian Knight, Martin Eden, Pierre Delalande, Roman Bonavena, Edwin Reardon, Mark Ambient, and Bergotte.

Scarcely had I run my eye along these shelves when at the turning of the aisle I came to an extensive section of texts in Latin and Greek, as well as translations into many languages, which stretched on and on for many aisles in all directions, and whose principle of unification eluded me. Here the shelves rose tier on tier to a height of thirty feet or more. Most of the authors were entirely unknown to me and even the names I recognized did not yield a clue. I noticed an Elizabethan translation of Ovid's *Medea*, a Latin translation in thirty-seven books of *On Nature* by Epicurus, a play by Euripides entitled *Bellerophon*. Without much interest I noted a collection of the complete works of Naevius, a biography of Pomponius Secundus by Pliny the Elder, an epic called the *Titanomachy*. I had no knowledge of Greek and a mere smattering of Latin, and my knowledge of even the translated classics was shamefully slight. Looking up in perplexity I asked in a whisper what these books were. Morpheus looked at me with disappointment or disdain and said in a stern undertone: "Know'st thou not thy classics?" Then I felt my cheeks burn; and raising his arm, and making a grand sweeping gesture, Morpheus said:

" 'Tis all the lost books o' th'ancient world. Here be the seventy-

two lost plays of Aeschylus, the hundred lost plays of Sophocles, the eighty lost plays of Euripides. Here be the thirty lost plays of that sweet rogue Aristophanes. Here wilt thou find the lost satires of Menippus of Gadara, among the which I would commend to thy rapt attention his wondrous journey to the lower world. Here be the lost philosophies of Thales, of Anaximander, of Anaximenes, of Xenophanes, of Parmenides, of Empedocles, of Democritus, and of Diogenes of Apollonia. Here be the lost histories of a mouthful o' names that be sweet to sound on the tongue, among the which there be Eugeon of Samoa, Deiochus of Proconessus, Eudemus of Paros, Democles of Phigalia, the Argive Acusilaus, Hellanicus of Lesbos, and Xanthus the Lydian, to name only them. Here wilt thou find the two hundred thirty-seven lost books of Theophrastus, the lost *Republic* of Zeno, the one hundred five lost plays of Menander. Here wilt thou find the incomparable lost works o' the Alexandrian pornographers. Here be the lost tragedies of Neophron of Sicyon and the lost comedies of Plato Comicus, and here be the lost epics o' the Cyclic poets, among the which Morpheus doth commend the *Little Iliad*, the *Iliupersis*, and the *Theogony*. These be but a few o' the motes i' the mighty moonbeam o' the lost works of ancient Greece, yet here wilt thou find as well all the lost works of Rome, among the which I would mention in especial Suetonius his *Lives of Famous Whores* and sweet Ovid his *Gigantomachy*, his *Medea*, and his *Triumph of Tiberius*. Here be the seventy-two lost works of Varro and that instructive treatise on the use o' the javelin by Pliny the Elder. Here be — 'sblood, ancient mariner, an thou not stick to thy alphabet I'll break thy neck."

This last remark was flung at a scholarly man lying on an upper shelf, who had been directing irritated glances at Morpheus and had begun to hiss out shushes. I quickly led Morpheus into another aisle, where the lost literature of the ancient world continued, winding into the distance and towering overhead; and awed by the sight of all the books that had disappeared from the upper world I said in hushed tones: "I hadn't known how many had been lost." "Aye," said Morpheus loudly, "there's no end of scribbling."

He led me through many winding aisles, where the lost literature of Greece and Rome continued unabated, and as I followed I began to feel we would never emerge from the heavilyladen shelves that soared out of sight into the upper darkness and turned and twisted relentlessly into the distance: and as we advanced I saw in the trembling haloes of the flamelights a fine dust falling, sifting down through the empty spaces, falling onto the shelves and into my hair, settling in the crevices of my shirt, falling upon the backs of my hands and the tips of my shoes, falling like a scarcely perceptible snow, covering everything.

After a while I became aware of a change. The shelves still soared high above, but now we were passing books of a different kind, and I realized we had entered an extensive section of medieval texts in many languages. This section appeared to stretch on in many directions and I felt relieved when at the turning of an aisle I saw titles in English. Here Morpheus paused to show me *The Book of the Leoun* by Chaucer and a thick collection of lost fourteenth-century lyrics. In a nearby aisle he pointed to shelf after shelf of Anglo-Saxon epics, among which he said were many that were far superior to Beowulf, especially *Wada* and the delightful *Offa*.

From here Morpheus led me into the aisles of the Renaissance, where the shelves were no more than fifteen feet high, and where he paused for a moment in the Elizabethan section before what he called his favorite play, *The Isle of Dogs*, by Ben Jonson and Thomas Nashe. "Aye, lad, there's life in it yet, and in many another lost play o' that sweet-tongued time. And I do have a love for that dark devil Raleigh, whose *Cynthia* here's found complete, the which Spenser hath so highly praised. Here be those works Ben Jonson lost i' the fire, the which he doth enumerate in his 'Execration upon Volcan,' and here be those lost works of sweet Jack Skelton, the which he doth mention in his *Garlande of Lawrell*, of which the best is 'The Balade of the Mustarde Tarte.' And here too wilt thou find the lost verses of gentle and honey-flowing Spenser, among the which old Morpheus doth commend for pleasant and delightsome reading *The Dying Pellicane*, *The Court of Cupide*, *My Slomber*, and *The English Poet*."

Despite my keen interest in these books my mind was beginning to feel overburdened with the weight of the lost literature of the upper world, and I asked Morpheus whether anything of value had been lost in more recent centuries. In reply he led me along winding aisles until he stopped suddenly and removed from the shelves a book that resembled a journal. This proved to be the celebrated *Memoirs* of Lord Byron. Morpheus said that it contained several amusing anecdotes of erotic adventures in Spain and Milan, and a short but lively account of the deflowering of Lady Byron on a sofa before dinner on their wedding day, but that on the whole it was disappointing, for it omitted all mention of that delightful and instructive subject, incest. Of modern books in general he said there were few losses of interest, by far the greater part being the private correspondence of great men, which had been deliberately destroyed by upright friends and relations; yet in the matter of fiction he confessed to a fondness for the second half of *Dead Souls*, and a remarkable novel called *The Messiah*, by Bruno Schulz.

Upon my exclaiming once again how many books had been lost, Morpheus laughed and said we had glimpsed but a few, for the

section of lost books spread out in many directions we had not followed; for we had not seen the lost literature of China, of Persia, of Arabia; and there were to be found as well the complete collections once housed in the lost libraries of Alexandria and Pergamum; for all books that had been lost in the upper world, and now led a phantom existence in the minds of men, here had their residence.

But at last leaving the maze of lost books, we came to an aisle that contained many names familiar to me, yet whose principle of organization I could not grasp. There I found a book by Lewis Carroll, entitled *Alice's Shadow*, with illustrations by John Tenniel. The first illustration showed Alice standing by a stream with her hands clasped behind her, while her shadow was sitting against a tree on the other side of the stream. There were many poems scattered throughout, among them a poem of two verses entitled "The Muffin and the Bandbox":

Said the muffin to the bandbox,
"Won't you come and dine with me?
I will serve you cabbage sandwiches
And turtles in your tea."

Said the bandbox to the muffin,
"I am sorry to decline,
But turtles are not tortoises,
Though both are fond of wine."

Nearby was a slender black volume on which were the words JAMES JOYCE. The book was untitled and unpaginated; it was written entirely without punctuation or capitalization, in a style of childlike simplicity. Beside it was a volume entitled THE POETICAL WORKS OF JOHN KEATS, vol. 3. To my surprise the volume contained not a single poem I recognized; yet as I read here and there, I heard unmistakably the music of Keats. There was a long poem in blank verse entitled *The Dream of Apollo*, a scattering of sonnets ("If to be heard . . .," "To _____"), several short pieces in a variety of forms, such as *Mirabel* and "Puck's Song," and a deeply felt poem in ottava rima called "Lines on the Death of Shelley." In perplexity I turned to the title page, which read: THE POETICAL WORKS OF JOHN KEATS. VOLUME III: 1822-1827. " 'Tis a somewhat uneven collection, with no strong burst like unto the summer of 1819 or the autumn of 1831; there's a backsliding here and there to the candied sweetness of wanton Madeline, and methinks there be overmuch solemnity in his Miltonic mouthings; yet hath an errant stanza hither and yon such melancholy-gay music as to draw marrow out of mortal bones and hale the soul out of a wanton roving god. Yet 'tis in his thirty-sixth autumn that he doth reach such heights

as few have eyes to see; for many are the miles, and weary the way, 'twixt pissing and Parnassus. 'Tis in that youthful-ripe year that he doth learn to mingle the stately measure wi' the sweet and wild to make such music as the Nine sisters joy to dance to, on the holy hill."

"But what are these books?" I asked softly, after a pause in which his words were borne away by the silence.

"Why, canst not see? Here be all those books that in thy world have been desired, yet by some caprice or oversight came not to be written. Here be the late poems of poets dying young, the books after the final books, the great works after the last great works. Here wilt thou find the novel after *Finnegans Wake*, the poem after *The Aeneid*, the play after *The Tempest*. And here wilt thou find the desired books of an age or nation, among the which there be the great American novel and the great French epic."

"And still the library goes on and on."

"Aye, that it does. For there be many aisles, and many turnings, in the library of Morpheus. Thou hast had a glimpse of those books not completed i' th'upper realm, and those books penned by imaginary-scribblers, and those books lost in the careless way o' thy world, and those books yearned-for yet unscribbled. Yet here's many a sweet book more than thou mayst chance to think on. Here be those books seen i' the fancy by scribblers o' th'upper world, but not endited, and among these the greatest is John Milton's epic of King Arthur, in especial the ninth book, though some there be that do prefer that *Life of a Great Sinner* the which was mused upon by that great sinner Dostoyevsky in the last years of his life. Here be the books of all those who dreamed of turning author, but through lack of faith, or will, or talent, or lucre, did not; and this is the great literature of unpursued careers, extending farther than thou couldst walk in a week of time. Here be the completer hist'ries of all th'imaginary heroes o' thy realm, wherein thou canst read of Don Quixote his childhood and of that course of study which young Hamlet did idle his time away withal at the University of Wittenberg. Here be the book of all th'imaginary races of all th'imaginary islands o' thy realm. There be books of silver and books of gold, books of glass and books of snow. There be books that grow on the branches of trees, and planted give birth to new trees bearing new fruit of books. There be books nourished by the mind of a reader, the which do grow pale, and wither away, and die, an they be not read. And there be divisions and subdivisions, categories and subcategories, to stretch out a god's speech beyond enduring; for in the library of Morpheus wilt thou find all those books which are imaginary in thy realm. Such, and many more, be the sweet books o' the library of Morpheus, which is to the libraries o' th'upper world as the sun to a candle, the moon to a peeled potato, all Eden to a

flowerpot, and Mount Helicon to the mole on the rump of Calliope."

We now continued through the library, and as we advanced I noticed that the books were growing larger. In one aisle they were two feet high; in the next the bottommost books came up to my chin; and we turned into an aisle in which vast shelves soared out of sight, and the books were twelve feet high. Morpheus paused before one of these great tomes and together we slowly and laboriously pulled it out. The cumbrous volume was three feet thick, and very heavy; it was with no small difficulty that we managed to lean it like an immense door against the base of the towering bookshelves. The cover was thickly overlaid with figured bronze. Morpheus pulling and I pushing, slowly we opened the heavy cover, walking in a long semicircle and at last leaning it against the shelves. We then walked back and proceeded to turn the blank inner leaf, which proved much easier to handle. The paper was strong and flexible though coarse-grained in quality; here and there a brown fleck the size of a thumbtack appeared. Upon the title page was the word *BRILDGRULL*, in thick black letters larger than my hand. We next opened to the first page, on which the text was printed in smaller letters, the capital A's being about the size of an ordinary pair of compasses and the small o's about the size of a silver dollar. The language itself, although printed in Roman characters, was not known to me; Morpheus revealed that it was Brobdingnagian, and that we had wandered into the portion of his library which housed the books of that great kingdom. I expressed awe at their great size, but Morpheus replied that giants came in many sizes, and that in remote aisles which we would not follow there were books four times the size, with letters one foot high; and he knew of one race of giants whose books were so large that the letter t' was the size of a telephone pole.

Morpheus now led me to an aisle where the books resumed their normal size, but as we advanced through the winding aisles I became aware that the library was changing. The darkness had increased, the books were becoming tattered and stained, here and there small puddles appeared in the aisles. The paths became more tortuous, new aisles appeared with every turning, and entire aisles lay in darkness. Here and there grassclumps, ferns, and twisting weeds sprouted between books, and even from the books themselves. I heard dim mutterings and whisperings in the darkened aisles and now and then faint laughter. In the dim reddish glow of a guttering flame I removed a book. The binding was damp and stained, and when I opened it I saw that the pages were mottled with brownish spots; a wettish wormlike creature crawled slowly across the page, leaving a trail of slime. The cracked and brownstained words appeared to be rotting on the page; they were difficult to decipher but seemed to be about a redfaced man doing something to a female corpse. When I thrust the

book back on its shelf my hand touched something soft; a small animal scampered across my hand and vanished in the dark. I stayed close to Morpheus as we continued along still darker aisles; a strong odor of urine rose to my nostrils and here and there on the edges of shelves I saw damp dripping clots of dung. On one shelf-space I saw a man with a sickly pallor and a soft loose mouth, who smiled at me as I passed; from his open trouserfly hung a small limp penis. Here and there in the darkness of shelves I heard the squeak and scamper of rats and saw the gleam of rat-eyes. A woman with lank damp hair lay on her back staring up as if in a trance; her knees were raised, causing her dress to fall along her slowly opening and closing thighs, between which protruded a stained book. Nearby, one open book lay face downward upon another open book that lay on its spine. The fetid odor of wet excrement increased as we advanced, until I could scarcely breathe; books lay moldering in dark yellow puddles in the aisles; books rotting on the shelves were riddled with holes and covered with soft growths resembling fungi. One book lying flat had rotted so thoroughly that it was little more than a hollow box filled with brown malodorous matter, round which sluggish fat flies buzzed, tinged with green. Some books in their decay had taken on a sinister beauty, and glowed with melting reds, greens, and purples. Still others seemed to be afflicted with diseases: one binding was covered with scablike scales, another was covered with red sores from which leaked yellowish extrusions of pus, from another oozed a thick sticky liquid that dripped down to the next shelf. As I passed one book a thick, sluggish snake slowly slithered out. Turning behind Morpheus into another aisle I was plunged into blackness; soft grunts and hisses issued from the shelves, there was a sound of oozing and dripping; my foot stepped on something soft that burst. In the distance I heard a sound of water. Turning into the next aisle I could see a faint lightness ahead, and after a few more turnings we came to a marble fountain bursting into white plumes.

Beyond the fountain the library resumed its former healthy appearance and even took on a pleasing pastoral air. The winding aisles began to rise and dip, and here and there arched bridges of stone appeared above, connecting the upper shelves. People strolled across the bridges or stood leaning on their elbows on the parapets, gazing down. Along the center of one wide and winding aisle a small brook in a stream-bed bubbled over stones. Open places at the junction of aisles appeared frequently; at one such place was a small and mazy wood, with benches set among the winding paths. Here and there in the shelves a rough-hewn opening would appear, which proved to be the entrance to a dark, booklined tunnel that wound through the heart of the thick shelves and finally emerged in the opposite aisle. At one

open place a wooded hill rose up. At the base of the hill was a runnel that led after numerous windings to a high cavern hung with torches and fitted with bookshelves adapted to the uneven formation of the interior. At the other side of the cave a tunnel led to an arched opening which admitted one to another winding aisle.

Gradually as we advanced the library lost its pastoral quality and took on a playful, even impish air. Soft conversation was audible in the aisles, and as I looked about I was surprised to find that the words were issuing from the books themselves. Some books were talking quietly, others appeared to be engaged in argument. I paused before two large and weighty tomes, who were debating the relative merits of Classic and Modern authors, while a third volume tried to gain their attention by insisting that those two categories were far from sufficient and that the worth of a book depended solely on its imaginative truth. This position was in turn derided by a thick and fierce-looking book on a nearby shelf, who maintained that "imagination" and "truth" were contradictory terms. A slender, delicate book, who coughed frequently, began to argue in feverish tones that the truth of a book lay in the degree to which it refused to be related to any world whatever, but a fit of coughing overtaking him he was obliged to break off.

These arguments held a strong interest for me, but my attention was distracted by a conversation taking place on a shelf several feet above my head. There a young man lying on his stomach was speaking in low, intense tones to a book that lay open before him. A feminine voice answered softly, and lightly laughed. Intrigued by this odd method of reading, I chose a book at random from an upper shelf. When I opened it I heard a soft though distinct conversation between a man and a woman. The conversation quickly became an argument; the man rose angrily; a door slammed; the woman wept softly. Suddenly she addressed me, and asked if I knew why he had so changed of late. I assured her I had no idea. She asked if I would help her, and promising her that everything would soon be all right I softly closed the book.

Morpheus seemed impatient to leave the aisle of talking books, and we passed now into an aisle where men and women stood leaning indolently against the shelves, talking lightly to one another, and occasionally taking small bites out of the books they held in their hands. A foppish youth, chewing thoughtfully, and brushing crumbs from his waistcoat with languorous flicks of his long white fingers, remarked to a young woman: "Rather heavy, don't you know," whereupon she replied: "Oh, but I do find him so absolutely delicious." Upon the partially chewed volume I noticed the words: ARCEL OUST. Several eater-readers appeared surfeited, and held their bloated stomachs in evident discomfort. One gaunt youth with black

burning eyes and fever-flushed cheeks walked rapidly along the aisle, biting hungrily into each book in turn, swallowing pieces in great gulps and moving on to the next. I noticed a volume entitled DICKENS, and giving way to curiosity I removed it from the shelf and took a small bite. It had the taste of roast lamb, peas, and mashed potatoes with gravy. Nearby I saw a volume entitled KAFKA, which I also had the curiosity to sample. It had the taste of pure, burning-cold water, which seemed to cut into my throat. I next tried a volume entitled POPE, and was astonished to find that it tasted like a gumdrop. I looked hungrily at volumes entitled JOYCE and MELVILLE and SWIFT and MILTON but Morpheus seemed impatient to continue, and we turned into another aisle.

Here books were fluttering across the aisle from one shelf to another, gently flapping their pages. Some of these books hovered uncertainly about the shelves, as if searching for a place to rest; others inserted themselves between books in rows, and appeared to sleep. Now and then the air became so thick with flying books that it became necessary for me to raise an arm before my face and with my other hand to push the sharp-edged books carefully aside as I passed. Once a book landed lightly on my shoulder and after a few steps rose with gentle flapping sounds and flew to a higher shelf.

We next came to an aisle crowded with people, whom I could see emerging from various books. These characters talked among themselves, strolled about, or entered other books. A woman who reminded me of Catherine Earnshaw stood talking to a man who bore a curious resemblance to Leopold Bloom. A beautiful young woman and a dashing young man emerged simultaneously from books in opposite rows; they walked off arm in arm, she fanning herself and lowering her eyes, he talking heatedly and stealing glimpses of her heaving bosom.

As I passed along this aisle I could not help being struck by the curious method of reading practiced by those lying on the shelves. One young man carefully opened a book and holding it upright advanced the top of his head slowly toward the pages. As his head reached the pages it met with no resistance but continued to advance, as if he were entering a tunnel. In this manner he slowly disappeared into the book. On an upper shelf I saw a volume lying open beside a pair of black high-heeled shoes.

As I passed a volume lying on its side, the cover opened slightly and a white arm emerged. It appeared to beckon to me. On an impulse I reached over and touched the soft hand, which instantly closed around my hand and began pulling me into the book. As my head passed through a substance that parted like mist I felt another hand grasp my ankle, for a moment I stared down at a rolling green

countryside with a castle in the distance, then I felt myself being pulled by the ankle up through the book and Morpheus said sternly: "Beware." Grasping me firmly by the arm he led me through this dangerous aisle, at one point rudely knocking aside a fellow with waxed mustaches who fell so violently against the shelves that books came tumbling down on him, and still keeping his grip on me he then led me through several whimsical and fantastical aisles, where prickly books hung on branches growing from the shelves and clung to me like burrs, or where ghostly and insubstantial books lurked on mist-haunted shelves in the hooting dark. He did not release me until we had emerged in a more sober portion of the library. I wanted to study this new group of books but Morpheus strode swiftly and I had to hurry to keep track of his robe-ends disappearing around the bends of the aisles. Around one turning a great door loomed before me; the center of the door was closing over a black-slipped foot. Pushing through the heavy curtain I found myself at the top of a circular stairway, down which Morpheus was already pattering.

I hurried down after him. At the bottom I came to an arch that opened onto a crevice-passageway, and turning right I hurried behind Morpheus along the dark and winding way.

All at once the passage ended, and I entered a great cavern-chamber.

Listless figures lay drowsily about. Before me loomed the black bed. We had entered facing a new angle of the bed and I felt confused and a trifle giddy as I followed Morpheus up the little stairway of crimson velvet and through the black velvet curtains onto the soft and sagging floor of his chamber. At the far end my forgotten lamp still burned on the shelf. I followed with a feeling of faint dizziness as Morpheus trod heavily toward the head of the bed, knocking over objects that fell softly. When he reached the pillows he flung out an arm and said: "Hail, Bed, haven of heroes, womb of wanderers, sweet swan of the River Morpheus. Take me to thy soft bosom, Bed, and wrap me round with thy sweet arms. Ope wide thy downy thighs, and admit me to thy most dark delights, O thou of the white belly, thou of the lush lap. And thou, soft Pillow, kiss my tir'd eyelids shut, for I'm a-weary, and fain would rest." With that he tumbled heavily into bed and I lay down beside my chair on the soft velvety bedspread. Despite my weariness I did not fall readily asleep but lay tiredly awake with my arm over my eyes as confused images sprang into my mind and melted away. I saw Ignorance walking up and down before the sluggish black lake which then became a black velvet curtain that parted suddenly to reveal a winding stairway. Books fluttered from the stairs and began to swirl about me and I had to knock them aside as I wandered lost among high pillars. After a while I felt myself drifting

toward sleep. Wearily I turned onto my side, and as I pressed my cheek against the velvet dark, all at once I saw the empty bench, the bright-green grass, the silver backstop, the blue nylon jacket with one arm dangling, but already they had begun to turn like objects on a merry-go-round, turning faster and faster to a whistling carousel melody, turning faster and faster until all outline was blurred away, turning and turning and whirling and spinning until they were a spinning wheel of dreams on the mighty canopy of Morpheus.

OceanofPDF.com

IV. The Tale of Morpheus and Volumnia



1. The Moral Maid

"HER name was Volumnia, and I loved not at first sight. There was a something high and haughty i' the wench, the which did show itself i' the carriage of her head, the flare of her narrow nostril, and the pinched and puckered corners of her tight-clasped rosy lips. She was the daughter of a high-toned lady o' thy realm, who i' the course of improving her soul by study and devout prayer did by some oversight succumb to the blandishments of a roving lecherous god. She betook herself, her prayers, and her swollen belly down to the realm of Morpheus, where in a remote chamber she reared her daughter in zealous adherence to principles of strictest virtue. Having forsworn lechery, yet was the poor dame destined to desert the narrow path of rectitude a second time, and so at the last fell swooning into the gentle arms of her lean lover, Death.

"The bereaved Volumnia, a fetching wench of fifteen, was brought up by a kindly old shepherd whose younger daughter had been devoured by a wolf, or mayhap 'twas by a kindly old wolf whose elder daughter had been devoured by a shepherd, for to speak true, old Morpheus hath little stomach for such prattlings, and would list wi' scarce concealed impatience as she dilated into reminiscence. 'Sdeath, 'twas the marginal notes o' memory, the very pedantry of recollection. Ye prattling lovers, and poets all, heed old Morpheus, when he doth say, your fairest remembrances have no more o' merit than the fairest remembrances of a cow. So by swift leaps come we to her eighteenth year, when on a day Volumnia was out walking i' the greenwood.

"Ah, Carl, what a forest hath Morpheus! Thou and I must stroll there, lad, indeed we must. 'Tis a place would make Robin Hood shiver a shaft for envy, and Rosalind weep o'er her little patch of green. 'Twas there the fair Volumnia did first espy a handsome stranger, out for a stroll i' the leafy boskage. All in a brown study she walked her meditative way along the shady margent of a stream, a

book in her snowwhite hand and a frown on her lilywhite brow. On a sudden she espies him, and draws back; yet not i' the manner of your true peasant wench, wi' that sweet fearfulness so pleasing to your roving wanton, but with a haughty, cross-tempered, unwelcoming air; and doth address him in periods so polished, wi' something so affected and formal-cold, as would freeze the cods and shrivel the sack of leaping Lechery himself. 'Sdeath, lad, I was out for wenches, not Tully i' the shape of woman. Heigh ho, thinks I, here's sport, and did proceed to banter wi' the maid, who all humorless did answer in labored paragraphs that yet did bewray true learning, independence of spirit, and a sort of heavy-moving wit, all stewing like so many prunes i' the juice of highest virtue. 'Sblood, I was irked; in turn I did vex her with my witty banter, my wanton-weary smile, and my rake's immodest gaze. So went we our separate ways, each sore-vexed wi' mother; aye, and self-displeased.

"Mayhap forwhy she irked me I did return, and again return, to banter wi' the Ciceronian maid, little weening I was marching posthaste t' the marriage gallows. Volumnia was fair, aye, passing fair, yet not so fair as many a rose swift-plucked and soon forgot; nay, not so long in flank, nor high in breast, as Morpheus fain would have desired; yet sweet in hip, with a firm and swinging walk, such as seemed to give promise of much delight. Yet 'twas not for such base pleasures, but for her high virtue, that I did woo her, as thou shalt hear tell. Now old Morpheus hath a little weakness, lad, which weakness is this: he doth take small joy in rude forcing of a maid, but the fort once besieged, would be invited to conquer by th'expiring foe. 'Tis a little refinement o' lechery highly pleasing to self-love. The wench vexed me with her high ways, and made me long to see her leveled on her back, yet would I be invited t' the lowering deed. So did time pass in pleasant Platonizing along solitary leafy ways, the while old Morpheus did plot her happy fall, and himself by slow degrees did all unwitting become ensnared in virtue's deadly net.

" 'Twas jealousy first drew me in. On a day I chanced to see the bookish maid sitting under a greenwood tree, beside a pretty shepherd lad. All solemnly she did read to him from out a book held open in her lap, he gazing on her rose-red lips the while. The youth did blush and start at my approach, but Volumnia looking up in earnest wise, doth tell a tale of how she would reform the customs o' the wood, and teach the poor unlettered lad his ABCs. Aye, a busy wench; an educating wench. 'Sblood, I could have broke fair Joseph's neck, but contented myself with a speaking look; for 'twould not do to have the fair Volumnia sighing o'er a bumpkin wi' the brain of a pumpkin. From that day forth I did turn our talk to love.

" 'Twas love-talk straight undid me, lad. Aye, lad: love. Hast heard

of love? She had volumes, nay, volumnias, to speak of love. She quoted the classics—the classics, forsooth! ‘Sdeath, I know not what a devil the classics may be, an they be not I. Why, she would fling Aristotle at me wi’s two kinds o’ virtue, saying how that intellectual virtue doth grow from instruction whereas moral virtue deriveth from habit, whence it doth take its name, *ethikos*; and how that moral virtue therefore dependeth on right conduct. Whereby I did answer, with my lecher’s smile, that inasmuch as Aristotle stateth how it behoves us to take care that our doings be o’ the right sort, forwhy our moral dispositions will vary in accordance therewith, so I did hope t’increase my capacity for moral virtue, which capacity doth develop through habit, by keeping company wi’ such a one as she. Yet did the moral maid retort, how in that same passage he doth most emphatically state, ‘twas no small matter what habits we form from early youth; and she much feared her, lest the long habit of looseness should have produced in me a disposition the very opposite o’ virtue. Nay, worse, in some small point I would maintain, she did accuse me o’ profligacy, th’ excess of temperance; I laughing, did accuse her of insensibility, the deficiency of temperance; whereat the pedantic wench did quote me how profligacy stands the more opposed to the virtue o’ temperance than doth insensibility; yet seemed piqued, to be thought cold.

“So did Volumnia, who knew as much of loving as Venus of praying, instruct me i’ the true art of love, and all to one end, that he who did truly love, could love but one, and that one forever. ‘Sdeath, and I who could love twenty in a week. Yet was there in the tune she sung a something, I know not what, tugged at my heart; for lechery’s a melancholy fellow, take him for what he is. Aye, in the soul of the stoutest rake, there’s a wee husband waiting to be born.

“For look thee, lad, ‘twas as if some spark of uncorruption in me grew fiery i’ the breath o’ that same talk, which I did laugh to scorn. For though I did mock, and leer, and play my ripe rogue’s part; yet not unwilling did I lend ear t’ the moralizing maid, and ‘gin to think on virtue, and a reformed life.

“So with her high talk of love and virtue she did by degrees insensible more enflame poor lambwhite innocent Morpheus than any loose wench with wanton rolling eye. Nay, soon were matters at such a pass, as I could scarce sleep o’ nights, but lay sore-sighing like a lad i’ the throes o’ calf-love. Not Troilus tossing in’s sheets for fair Cressid’s sake was half so sick with love-longing as whoring Morpheus for his virtuous Volumnia. I could scarce eat, lad; leaned my drawn cheek upon my drooping hand; sighed at the sight of my love’s least eyelash; envied Zephyrus, who wantoned with her hair. I scribbled sonnets by the cartload, wherein I did o’erflow wi’ fair comparisons. Her eyes alone I did call lodestones to draw me, twin suns to outshine heaven’s

one sun, virtuous skies wherefrom love's beams be darted, bright stars
t'illumine my wretched woeful night, crystal springs sacred to the
Muses, mirrors o' virtue, high windows in love's chamber, fair books
wherein to read of heav'nly love. Save for chaste allusion to her
virtuous breast, I strayed not lower than her alabaster neck; which
strictness causing me to wax ingenious, I did endite a sonnet to her
nose, paired sonnets to her ears, and thirty-two sonnets in praise of her
teeth. Why, man, I rained sonnets; and all for love of my virtuous
Volumnia. Nay, I did 'gin to feel unworthy of such a one as she, and
feared me I could ne'er lift myself so high. I did tremble at thinking I
might be banished from out her sight, for some careless word or
bawdy look. Faith, I was in a fair way of reformation, and scarce dared
lift my lowly eyes in her lofty presence. In all she asked, I eagerly
obeyed. 'Sdeath, I scarce knew my own mind; for I, who'd begun i' the
way of dalliance, with a stray desire o' seduction, was now tossing in
my sheets for my princess of pedantry and chaste Diana of the
effusions; while she, who'd begun i' the high way of disdain, now
showed herself hellbent to mend the moral flaws she glimpsed in me.
Nay, more, she'd question me close, and try to see my inner darkness
clear; which darkness did draw her on like the sun of virtue itself.

"So while I sighed in innocent love-longing, aswoon wi' thoughts
o' virtue and a reformed life, all unbeknown to her the chaste
Volumnia darkened i' the shadow o' the vices she but half-suspected
yet all lustily pursued.

" 'Twas the little matter o' the pool did 'gin to ope my eyes t' more
ways than one, ensnaring me e'er deeper in treacherous nets of virtue.
I' the woods where we walked was a shady pool, where sometimes we
agreed to meet; for all the while the lass was spouting her Aristotle,
she was meeting me covertly, unbeknown t' the old shepherd her
adoptive father. Now on a day, arriving at the pool, I know not what
fancy came o'er Volumnia, but on a sudden raising a creamwhite hand
to her dove-white brow, she declares she's hot, and will bathe; saying
how she doth trust me to keep away intruders, and not to violate her
maidenly modesty by the base action of spying; adding thereunto, that
did I 'gin to feel my resolution weaken, I might strengthen it wi' the
knowledge that from that second I would be banished forever.
Beshrew me but I did believe her; and while she bathed i' the pool not
twenty feet away, old Morpheus, that true Galahad and prince o'
virtue, did stand faithful guard, trembling lest he should lose an
eternity of bliss for the sake of a moment's passing pleasure. 'Sfoot, I
near melted with hot imaginings; yet did I remain fixed to my spot like
an allegory of Virtue guarding Innocence in the Forest of Desire. Ah,
then did old Morpheus taste the pleasure o' virtue triumphant, as he
stood wi's back to his naked lady, crushing down his baseness and

o'ercoming vice. She at length emerging all clothed from out the trees, I did turn to her with a look o' triumph; yet methought she seemed not so well pleased, but asked impatiently if no one had passed by, and would talk of other things.

"Yet was I so ta'en wi' mine own sweet victory, that I scarce did think on Volumnia the fair; but turning my sight inward, did behold visions of shining virtue.

" 'Twas not long after, what time we were walking i' the greenwood, prattling of love and such sweet matters, that we come t' the pool again; and Volumnia raising a swanwhite hand to her milkwhite brow, says she needs must bathe, or die; and Morpheus to stand watch as before. Marry, methinks, what's this; 'tis passing strange; well well, when virtue's new-minted, mayhap 'tis deserving of suspicion; nay, 'tis trial by water; ho, she'd prove me; then stand firm, old belly-lover, and down, lechery, thou whoreson knave. Volumnia did betake herself t' the water, and I to my testing tree, whereto I clave, and waited. Aye, waited; till it did seem, she kept too long hid; and all unbid, knave curiosity comes me creeping in. But 'tis a long tale, and tedious; for though I've all eternity to talk, thou hast but Time to hear me in. What say'st thou, lad? Woo't stroll out into the night wi' Papa Morpheus?"

"Come on now, Morpheus, none of that. What happened?"

"Why, lad, it doth sadden me deep, and pain me sore, that thou shouldst waste thy time in idle listening to an idle tale, told by such a rogue as I. What? Wouldst peep through the bushes at Chastity at her bath? Art not mindful of Actaeon? Nay, I would fain turn to matters o' more moment, and speak of the mutual attraction of two loving souls, enamored of intellectual beauty. Wouldst corrupt me into lecherous talk?"

"Nay, Morpheus, thou dost mistake me. Thy tale doth promise to be rich in moral instruction, and 'tis for that reason I do implore thee to continue."

"Why, thou'rt a wag after mine own heart, lad; a sweet wag, and most devilish sweet rogue. Then here's to moral instruction, and tales o' virtue. Come, let me fill thy cup. Aye, that's good. And now drink up, for wine like virtue doth enflame the soul; and like sweet virtue, by how much the more 'tis felt, by so much the more 'tis followed lovingly. For as Aristotle saith, in his *Nicomorphean Ethics*, drunkenness is but a gentle mean 'twixt the harsh extremes o' sobriety and insanity."

Here he paused to take a long swallow, before continuing his tale.

2. Volumnia Bathing

"She did keep long hid; and I at my tree did by degrees wax wondrous curious. 'Sdeath, methinks, an my lady should be drowned, and I tied to my tree by ropes o' virtue. So did I seem to hear, i' the marrow o' my mind, a soft insistent whispering, the which did urge me from my tree. Now mark well, lad, had I been virtuous in my bones, I'd not ha' played at shill I shall I, but cried out, and run after; yet knowing my vice o' lechery, and how I was being put t' the test, I did remain firm, resisting temptation, and plain sense too, yet led on by the evil pictures in my corrupted mind, till I was in a sweat o' lust, and old pillicock stiff as a lance.

"Now as I sweated there, and wavered, thinking mayhap virtue itself commanded me to take a peep, to see no harm had befallen my love, lo, comes me a crackle i' the grass, out steps the fair Volumnia — and I with a thing to hang a hat on. Yet 'twas but the sign o' virtue victorious, for o'ercoming my distress, What, quoth I, is it you, and so soon; for it seemeth me I've but fall'n into a muse, and now you are here. Quoth she, You would do well, sir, not to dream at such a time; did you see nothing then? Nay, Madam, naught save the end of my nose. Then, sir, quoth she, seeming not well pleased, you saw not well; for many things be not seen, that yet lie under one's nose. Madam, quoth I, would that you would lead me by the nose, that I might learn to follow my nose to you. Sir, said she, I see you will cut off your nose to spite your face; and swishing her skirts as 'twere in anger, she did stride away.

" 'Twas not long after, when for a third time she must needs bathe i' the wanton pool, and try old Morpheus at the chaste tree. And lo, no sooner had I heard a rustle and gentle splash, than I 'gan to grapple with fell lechery; yet mindful o' the hound-torn boy, I did stand fast, though all in a sweat. Time did pass, nay, eternity did pass; and all the woods were deathly still. And Volumnia issuing not forth from her bath, I did grow sore troubled, and burned to look; yet still old Morpheus stood his gallant ground. Yet when it seemed she'd ne'er come forth, at the last I did call out, Volumnia, ho! Volumnia! Echo answered; and the woods were still. 'Twas then irresolution did 'gin to rot and rust mine iron purpose; and in that weakening I turned, and stepped all softly through the trees.

"The pool was thick-enclosed with high bushes, that here and there left scant space to glide through; and coming soft through the trees t' the bushes, I did 'gin to tremble, yet bent me down and soft-parted the thick-entwined branches. And lo, not ten feet away, i' the midmost o' the pool, there I espied Volumnia. She stood naked i' the water with her back to my prying eye. The water did but halfway cover her nether globes, which 'neath the wave were as veiled and dim-visible. 'Sdeath, 'twas a sight nigh took my breath away. For such

an arse as that, Paris did sweetly sigh, and Troy did greatly burn. For such an arse as that, Sigurd rode through the fiery ring, and Tristan did take a little drink one day. On both sides o' the lower back, the chaste Volumnia was blessed wi' those twin puckers, the which old Morpheus hath named Venus' dimples. Aye, 'twas a sight t'inspire the virtuous breast with high ambition and noble longing, for like brave Sidney I'd fain have died in those netherlands; nay, like a bolder Drake, I'd ha' circumnavigated two globes. Yet was it passing strange, to find her so, and no answer to my shouts.

"Now as I lurked, and looked, and licked my lechers lips, lo, a small voice 'gan to whisper, saying, Ho, Morpheus, virtue's cold company, then to it, man, wherefore hang'st thou back like a boy? What? Wouldst be another Moses, and die in sight o' the promised land? What hast thou by thy sighing but a full bag and an empty bed? 'Tis the part of a fool to forsake a certain for an uncertain thing. Wouldst sacrifice a moment's sure pleasure for an eternity of hope? Thou know'st not what the future may bring, yet for that unknown future thou wilt rein in thy appetite. Is it for virtue's sake? Why, what is't to be virtuous, but to have nothing gilded with a name? Canst see this fellow virtue? Canst touch him wi' thy little finger? Hath he one particle o' solidity, such as the least atom o' flesh may lay claim to? And for this virtue, this word, this breath, this nothing, wouldst thou banish thyself fro' those fleshly somethings that do visibly before thee lie? An it be so, thou art grown a great fool indeed. — In such wise did a small voice whisper, the while I pried on Volumnia's fair arse; with this strange issue, that peering Morpheus, prying Morpheus, spying Morpheus, did lower his lusting eyes. Aye, lad; for on a sudden old Morpheus did feel a prick of shame. 'Sfoot, I was so far gone in virtue, 'twas all I could do, not to cry out, and beg pardon. Yet was I not so far gone, as not to keep silent and well hid, lusting wi' shame-lowered eyes. 'Twas when things were come to such a pass, that chaste Morpheus did first think on marriage.

"For look thee, though desire's a ramping steed, yet virtue's a reining-in rider; which two conjoined i' the one race, do vex both horseman and horse. Whereby I was led to enquire, how virtue and pleasure might ride together. So pondering, methought how fool-hasty and foolish-hardy 'twould be, all to lose, a moment's forced pleasure to gain; and deep-musing how I might take full and virtuous possession o' those newfound lands, and all that pertained thereunto, whereby I would have thee understand gardens, fountains, hills, dales, meadowlands, and mossy caves, I did arrive at holy matrimony.

"So is it true that the sight o' Volumnia's naked arse did strengthen me in virtue, and inspire me wi' chaste thoughts, whom restless imagination had made weak in resolution. Thus doth the lower

lead unto the higher, as Plato hath truly said.

"Therefore did I turn, and creep soft away. Yet as I turned, my left heel chanced to come down on a twig i' the way, which loud-snapping, did make my heart to thrum i' my breast, and the sweat to run down; but low-bending I did creep away, and station myself at the guardian tree.

"Soon comes my clothed lady crackling out, and eyes me close. Well, sir, saith she, did you call? Nay, Madam, but mayhap 'twas some shepherd lad, calling to his sheep. 'Tis strange, saith she, for I did think to hear your voice; mayhap you were a-dreaming once again; did you see naught? Madam, I know not whether I did wake or sleep, yet did I see a sight so passing fair, as did seem to lift my soul from out my body, and part me from myself. Well, saith she, and what sight was that? Madam, I know not, for it hath left me as a dream. Sir, I know not what to think of such visions; but did you not hear a footfall i' the trees, and snapping of a twig; which did fright me so, that I did dress hastily, for fear of spies. Madam, 'tis you who dream; for as for me, Madam, I have been all the while here at this tree, and seen no body save your sweet self. Whereat she did lower her eyes, making me much to fear, lest she had glimpsed my meaning. Yet seemed she not displeased; and prattling of love we did take our way all sweetly through the greenwood.

" 'Twas soon after the sight of her naked arse that I did gin to woo in earnest, and press my suit hotly though in all chaste governance. Volumnia did lend ear, and look grave, yet would she not yea me nor nay me neither, but needs must think and ponder, for she did say, marriage was no light matter. Truer words ne'er spake she, pox take her, and the foul plague too. It did slither out by degrees, how she yet had some mistrust of me, and could not plight her troth till such time as she could feel secure o' my faithfulness; for now and again I did let fall some little word, which did lead her to fear, I was not so firm set i' the path of virtue, as she might wish. 'Twas at this time Olympia doth enter the story.

3. Volumnia and Olympia

"Olympia was the shepherd's daughter, who'd been reared wi' Volumnia as a sister, and was her companion to such extent as a simple country maid could be companion to Volumnia, who methought mingled disdain wi' fondness for the wench, yet was companionable in some things. Olympia had knowledge of our meetings, and sometimes served watch; I knew her but little, and most by sight. Yet now did she 'gin t'accompany Volumnia, and the three of

us stroll all brotherly sisterly together i' the greenwood. She was a buxom wench, pretty enough in her sunburned blunt-nosed way, firm in hip and haunch, her hands coarse and thick-fingered. Aye, well she looked a lass fine fit for the belly-game, yet modest withal; such a one as I'd fain ha' tumbled, had I not turned virtuous; but I sighed only for Volumnia. I cared not greatly for the lass, by whose presence I was much encumbered in urging of my suit; yet was I not pleased to see Volumnia's 'haviour towards her, for 'twas as if my lady looked at her from out a high tower. Aye, and close-watched the wench mistrustingly, and seemed oft irritable, and out of sorts. Yet did Olympia serve her willingly, fetching this and that with a yes my lady and no mischief; and I prudent as a husband.

"Now on a day Volumnia growing o'er-fretful, did unfairly chide Olympia for some trifle; and I siding wi' the wench, Sir, quoth Volumnia, I see you are kind-hearted; but so uttered, as her words did seem daggers sharp-thrusted. Nay, Madam, quoth I, not kind, but cruel; for I have been unkind to myself, an I have aroused your displeasure. What, said she, I see you are determined to put me out of humor, for you do mock at me with my own words. 'Sdeath, quoth I to myself, here's trouble. Madam, quoth I, I mock not, but methought you chided the girl unfairly. Unfairly, cries she, nay, sir, I'll no more of this—let the girl be judge—sister, did I chide thee unfairly? Nay, Madam, saith she, all in a whisper, and eyes downcast. You see, sir, saith Volumnia. Aye, Madam, say L So walk we three in silence. Sir, saith Volumnia, I see you are out of temper. Nay, Madam, not L Sister, saith Volumnia, thou wilt oblige me, by going on ahead, for I would speak in private. So the wench doth stride off ahead. Sir, saith Volumnia, I see you would chide me with your silence. Chide you, Madam, nay, think not so. Sir, methought you did take my sister's part with uncommon heat. Nay, Madam, no uncommon heat, I did but think you were o'er-hasty, yet mayhap I spoke sharp all unwitting. Sir, leave me to myself, and go to Olympia; I will join you when I will. Madam, I would not willingly leave you thus. Nay, go, cries she, I would be alone.

"So sighing I did take my way alone, and soon did come to Olympia, standing i' the path. Your sister is out of temper today, quoth I. The wench replieth nothing, but lowers her eyes. So we do stand each on the side o' the path, like two fools. Olympia, say I, I do fear some harm may come to Volumnia, and beseech you to see if all be well. So off she hies. Now I was waxing impatient, when I did hear sounds of anger on the path below; so swift-striding back, lo, I do find Olympia in tears, and Volumnia all aflame. What's this, I cry. Sir, cries Volumnia, she hath confessed all. Confessed, I cry, 'sdeath, confessed what? Do you curse, sir, do you curse? Nay, good Madam, the cry

escaped my lips all unbeknown to me, i' the heat of distress. Sir, quoth she, I have no more to say, our lives are now sundered. Sundered, Madam, and for no reason. Reason enough, sir, for you have behaved treacherously and lasciviously. 'Sdeath, you wrong me, Madam. Pray curse louder, sir, 'tis fitting. Madam, of what stand I accused? I'll not repeat such filth, sir. Aye, and stood looking daggers at me, and Olympia bawling like a babe.

"So comes it out by degrees, how Olympia hath confessed, I did touch her on the leg. The leg, Olympia, cry I, what a devil have I to do with your leg? Sir, your speech is scarce fit for the stable, saith Volumnia. Nay, where on the leg, Olympia, cry I. Worse and worse, lad, for it doth come out, how by that same word leg is signified rump. A lie, I cry, 'tis a plot to undo me! So did I cross-question the bawling maid. Now comes it out, how the wench doth not know, what a devil she hath said. Didst thou not confess, cries Volumnia, he did touch thee wantonly on the leg? Nay, Madam, cries the wench, but you did question me so close, I knew not what I spake. Didst thou not say, continueth my fair charmer, how his hand did brush wantonly against thee? Nay, Madam, but you did ask, whether his hand had touched my clothes in any part, and I said nay, except it had been unbeknown to me. And so saying, bursts into a storm o' tears. Nay, cease your bawling, quoth I, and good Madam, pray leave off these vain imaginings; for my heart is devote wholly unto you, and none other.

"Comes a day soon after, the three of us walking i' the greenwood, when we come nigh the pool, wherein Volumnia thrice had bathed; and raising a marblewhite hand to her ivorywhite brow, she doth say, 'Tis hot, sister, is it not? Aye, sister, 'tis hot indeed, saith the sweating wench. I would rest awhile, saith Volumnia, but thou, sister, go t' the pool there, and bathe thyself i' the cool water, and we shall await thee here, by this tree, and guard against passers by. Now when Olympia did hesitate, Volumnia did urge her so, as there was no saying nay; and the wench going t' the pool, we two did stay by the virtuous tree. 'Tis a well-favored maid, saith my lady, and will fetch a fine husband, an I be not mistaken. Nay, I know not, Madam, if she be well-favored or no, for I have but eyes for you. Why, sir, hath she not a fine black eye, and red lips? Madam, quoth I, be not offended if I speak ill of your sister, yet methinks she hath a mouth too large, and her black eye doth put me in mind of a raven's wing. Aye, saith Volumnia, but is she not graceful and well-favored of her person, and doth she not have a sweet and taking walk? Madam, if to be well-favored is to be a great drayhorse and walk like unto one drawing a load, then is she well-favored indeed, and doth excel in her walk. Fie, sir, you are unkind; and I begin to think, you are grown insensible. Aye, Madam, insensible to all who live on earth, save only you, who are my sun. Sir,

saith she, I fear you do injustice to my sister. Nay, Madam, for to speak true, I scarce have ta'en note of her, and could wish her gone. What, scarce ta'en note of her; then how is't possible to say, you do find her ill-favored? Why, Madam, may I not pay no mind to a mangy dog, yet know well 'tis a dog, and mangy? O, fie sir, you go too far; nor can I well believe you, but think you hope to deceive me with base flattery. Say not so, Madam, for 'tis not flattery, but truth itself. Yet is there somewhat false in what you say, sir, for 'tis plain to all, she is well-favored, though coarse in feature, and brown-hued; nor can I believe you, except you look well. Madam, I will cast a glance at her, when she doth return. Nay, sir, I'd not have you stare her out of countenance, and give her a fright; but methinks 'tis best, that you do observe her, without her knowing. And so saying, the chaste Volumnia doth turn and lead me a-tiptoe through the trees.

"Nay, more, lad: she doth lead me, by what dark divination I know not, direct to that same bush, through the which I had late looked upon her naked arse; and she doth lift all softly for my peeping eye the self-same branch, close-watching me the while.

"Olympia did stand half-turned away, bending o'er the water to wet her arms. 'Sdeath, 'twas a handsome animal, firm-rumped and well-flanked, strong-hipped and flat-backed, fit saddle for such a rider as doth love to ride wild o'er rough country. Dost know arses, lad? Now of arses, there be many sorts and kinds, and of these kinds the two most commonest be your smiling arse, or welcoming arse, and your lofty arse, or rump disdainful. Olympiad was o' the welcoming kind. Ah, lad, it near brought tears to my eyes, to see an arse so frank and fair and debonair as I there did espy. For look you, Volumnia's arse was of the lofty kind; fair, aye, marvelous fair, yet i' the cold high way of queenly beauty. And when Olympia did somewhat turn, and half-show her fair belly well-thatched, ah then did old Morpheus feel a tug at heart and groin. Yet 'gainst my cheek did I feel the breath o' my lady Volumnia, and the burning of her eye, which things did cause me to master my face, and banish all feeling thence, driving it down into the darkness of my unreformed parts; and so lowering my eyes, like unto one who hath been shown a new toy, by a child, and hath looked on politely, I did turn away, and Volumnia after.

"Arrived at the tree, Sir, quoth she, now do you see, you have spoke untrue, for is she not well-favored? Madam, quoth I, I know not what you may mean by well-favored, but as for me, I did find her ill-formed, and lumpish, like unto a great vessel of clay, ill-turned on the wheel. Well sir, quoth she smiling, I see you will not be caught out, but will speak cozening words; yet I would wish to know, whether you have seen fairer than my sister. Indeed, Madam, that I have. What, sir, do you spy and creep about! Nay, Madam, not I; but I did see a vision

fairer far, which did flee as in a dream; and that fair vision hath so filled my mind, that I am like one who hath looked at the sun, and can see naught after. With this answer she did seem well pleased, and said no more; but on a sudden she cries, Olympia, ho, sister, come! Aye, sister, cries the lass. Sir, quoth Volumnia, methinks my sister hath sharper ears than I. Is it so, Madam, saith Morpheus, is it so.

“ ‘Twas not long after, when coming t’ th’appointed place, there did I find Olympia on the path, alone; who all perturbed, and seeming affrighted, doth tell me how her sister hath been ta’en sick, and not able to come, hath sent her to meet me, and walk with me a way, that my journey should not ha’ been in vain. What, sick, cry I, and how, and is she in danger? Olympia assuring me her sister lay in no danger, but was ta’en with the headache, and mild fever, yet spake in such restless and dark-seeming wise, with eyes thrown this way and that, as to put me in great fear, lest Volumnia should be gravely ill; and on my urging of further questions, she did cry in great agitation, Oh please, sir, ask no more, she is in no danger, and seemed nigh to tears. But return then, cried I, and look after her, lest she be ta’en worse; and tell her, my life hangs on her life. Oh no, sir, please, sir, she did request in especial, that I should walk out with you, and then return. And so saying, in breathless wise, and frowning deep, and casting her eyes about, she doth set forth along the path, and I at her side. The wench soon darkening into a gloom, doth fall into such melancholy muse, as to make me fear lest Volumnia should be in mortal danger; yet did she seem sore troubled by my questioning, and sought to turn my talk into other paths. Then did I speak of my love for Volumnia, and how I would have her to wife, yet how she did mistrust me, and would have none of me; and implored her to speak to her sister of my faithful devotion and chaste love, the which she did eagerly promise to do. Yet would Olympia say naught herself, but did seem to shun me, and would not look direct upon me; and did seem affrighted of me, as I were a villainous dog. Yea, once, lifting my hand in careless wise, the tip of my finger light-brushing her sleeve, she so drew back and looked about in dread, as ‘twere the tip o’ my lance I’d offered her, and she with her back against a tree; all which did vex me so sore, as I did gin to think on her in lecherous wise, all the while speaking of my love for the chaste Volumnia.

“Came we then to a small and mazy path, that did branch aside fro’ the main path; and stopping there I did say, how I should like to rum into the wood, and find a quiet place to rest awhile. She drawing back, I did await her quiv’ring protestation; yet lowering her eyes she doth wi’ strange obedience turn onto the path; yet as if fearful and all unwilling. Soon come we to a deep-secluded spot, a small and shady clearing ‘twixt close-growing trees; and there looking quick about me,

I did throw myself down upon the greensward, and sigh, like one sore burdened. Olympia did stand apart, yet when I urged her sit, did so in obedience, though at some distance from me, her eyes cast down, yet looking up fearfully. Madam, quoth I, here is a space I have cleared i' the grass, which I commend as 'twere a grassy couch; nor would I have you so eschew propinquity, as to cast doubt upon my brotherly intentions; for I would but speak to you anent your ailing sister. At this I did see the darkness of a blush on her sunburnt cheek, and I nigh blushed myself, to make such a silken scoundrel's speech as that, to the chaste sister of my virtuous lady. Yet was I all in amaze, to see how she slow did rise, and step over, and sit her down i' the grass; yet not beside me, but at some small distance, and in such shunning wise, as did perplex me sore. Olympia, quoth I, you are vexed with me. Nay, sir, quoth she, casting her eyes a-down, and raising 'em in startled wise, and downcasting 'em again. Olympia, quoth I, you do seem tir'd, and sit bolt upright; yet is the grass soft, and well clear of pismires, scarabees, and other insecta, whose names I have forgot; and will rest you. She said not a word, but straight laid her down i' the grass; there lying still as stone.

"Now 'tis curious, lad, but there was that i' the manner o' the lass did make me pause in my desire; for 'twas as though she would do all my bidding, yet not willingly. Nay, I'll claim no virtue in't, for I was but a lecherous dog with a bone to bury; yet was I troubled in mind, to see the lass coldly lying there, as she were waiting to be lowered into her grave. And I know not how it was, but a pity did come stealing o'er me, and turned me fro' my plunging purpose. So did I lie still, and she lie still; and all silent as the grave. Yet as I lay, like as one dead, desire waxed in me, and I did think to force her, there as she lay. So turning my head, I gazed at the wench, who did lie i' the grass with her head turned away. And I was sore torn, 'twixt pity and lust for the wench; and as I gazed on her, mine eyes did chance to rise to a branch i' the copse behind where she lay, whereon I spied a squirrel. He did sit still, and gaze at me wi's little dark eyes; then on a sudden he did dart off, as one affrighted. And lo, I did sit up, wi' swift-pounding heart; for as in a vision or waking dream, I did seem to see Virtue in full splendor there.

"And quick-rising, whereby I did affright the wooden wench, who sat up and eyed me askance, I did 'gin to pace about, and speak of virtue. I did sing its praises, and how it filled the soul with goodness, and happiness; and I did compare it to the sun, shedding its rays o'er a dark world. Faith, I waxed wondrous eloquent, and did pace so hard, and so threw my arms about, as to make Olympia sit all in a tremble, as 'twere before a madman raving. And in my madness, like one unmindful of where his steps do lead, I did chance to step t' the

squirrel-tree, beside which a thick bush did grow; and starting back, wi' my hand pressed to my heart, I said all in a fright: Ah, Madam, you did give me such a start, as I had seen a ghost. Nay, quoth Volumnia, stepping out fro' behind the bush, and wiping a leaf from her hair, 'tis no ghost, but I only, who recovering, did come to seek you, and found you here. Say, sister, quoth she to Olympia, thou shalt catch thy death, on the cold ground; but rise, and let us continue our walk together, all three. Madam, said I, it doth my heart good, to see you so speedily recovered; for I have been so sore at heart, to think you unwell, that I could scarce walk, and laid me down like one slain wi' grief; yet thinking on yourself, and virtue, I did so revive, as to feel new vigor; and rising, and wishing you here, I did so marvel, to see you in truth, as I can but think it a miracle, that did lead you to me, like an angel from heaven. Fie, sir, how you do talk; come, Olympia; you must tell me, whereof you spake, before I chanced upon you; and so saying, she did lead her off arm in arm, and I after.

"Now all the while 'twixt adventures o' this sort, whene'er I did find me alone wi' Volumnia, Olympia falling behind, or going on ahead, I did urge my suit most warmly; and Volumnia now seeming to incline, now drawing back in maidenly irresolution, yet seemed more favorably disposed, than in my wooing's infancy, which seeming did spur me to yet more eloquent urgings of my chaste passion. Nay, more, she 'gan to relish secrecy, and would draw back in alarm, if Olympia returning fro' the wayside should chance upon us; all which was superfluity of fear, her sister well knowing all that lay between us, and how I would wed. Yet did Volumnia so delight in seeming secrecy, as I would not spoil her sport; yet was I perplexed to know, if it were sport indeed, when seeing her sister she would start back all guilty, and the blood in her face. I did encourage the sport, taking advantage o' the game to lean my lips close to her dainty ear and whisper sweet urgings, as, Madam, would we were alone, or Madam, would I were a violet, which, being plucked by you, might find soft harbor in your bosom. She, who all alone with me would not ha' brooked such utterance, yet Olympia being near, lent willing ear to all my whisperings; and so in the shadow of Olympia I did woo Volumnia.

"Now a time came, when asking again for her hand, and urging my devotion to virtue, my many proofs o' fidelity, and my extirpation of ancient vice, she did reply, that she did sometimes marvel, how one so insensible as I should e'er ha' fall'n into viciousness; for true virtue consisted! not in cold insensibility, but in the o'ermastering of a warm and passionate nature; and though she did esteem me much, yet did she fear, she could not bind herself in everlasting union, to one so cold as I. At these words I did feel a freezing sensation about the heart; yet

wrath rising in me, I did hiss, Cold, Madam, do you call me cold, and without further ado, did seize her about the waist, and kiss her full-smackingly on the mouth, and press my hot hand 'gainst her heaving bosom. Nay, villain, how dare you, cries she, and doth break from my grasp, all heaving, and her eyes flashing anger, as Olympia steppeth round the bend with a posy o' days-eyes and daffadownillies. O sister, cries Volumnia, I have had such a fright; for a great bee did buzz about me, and near stung me; yet now 'tis flown away.

4. Volumnia and the Humble-Bee

"Yet 'twas a bee, a little humble-bee, as did lead Volumnia, not long after, t' the marriage altar. Dark and marvelous are the ways of virtue, lad; for jump at the instant I thought my suit lost, lo, I was wived, and that by cause of a bee. Now after that the chaste Volumnia did call me villain, I much feared me, lest I should be banished from out her company; yet seemed she not so wroth, but did lend ear to my implorations; and without forgiving, did seem to forgive. Now on a day she doth appear at th'appointed place, sans Olympia; and doth say, with worried mien, how her sister hath been ta'en ill of a cramp, and would rest her at home; yet would she come a small way with me, though tir'd, if I did promise, to behave virtuously, as befitted one who wooed a maid. I did swear unto Virtue itself, that I would be but as a little spaniel, and trot all meekly at her side. At this she doth smile, and say how I must promise to be her little spaniel, and obey her in all things; and so prattling we do take our way. She would hear none of my suit, and urged my promise to be obedient, whereat I all sweetly obeying, was vexed at heart; for though I was pleased not to have forfeited her chaste company by my late outburst, yet was I troubled to know, what she would of me. Soon coming t' the little bypath, wherein I had turned with Olympia, she did say, raising an alabasterwhite hand to her appleblossomwhite brow, how she was tir'd, and how she remembered her, what pleasing retreat did lie this way; and so saying, she did there enter, and soon came we to the secluded place.

"Volumnia seemed not tir'd, but did walk from tree to tree, and bush to bush, exclaiming the while, how like Eve's garden 'twas, save more secure; for herein was Nature's bounty, yet did it want that tree, whose fruit once tasted, brought woe into the world. 'Sdeath, lad, I knew not what to think, or say, for though I had been lechery's lieutenant, and did serve him well i' the wars, yet was I but a beardless boy in virtue's lists, and did much fear me, lest I should be unseated, and laughed to scorn. So did I hold my tongue, and hang sullen back.

"Now in that place stood bushes, wi' blossoms; and as Volumnia

did trip from tree to tree, and blossom to blossom, she did raise a bee, which buzzing round her head, did make her to cry out, and wave her arms. Nay, Madam, I cried, be not affrighted, and wave not so your arms, lest you anger him, and he do sting; but she doth run to a tree, and brush the air, and shake her skirts, as she were ta'en with a fit; crying Oh Oh Oh the while. I do step over, and trying to calm her, do spy a little humble-bee, buzzing near her hair; and swinging my hand about her head, do chase him away. There, Madam, calm yourself, I have chased him from you; for 'twas but a little humble-bee, that was affrighted by your waving. Nay, saith she, I do fear me, you have but chased it to another place, where it may sting me unseen. Nay, Madam, I see it not; it hath returned t' the blossom; fret not. Oh Oh Oh, cries she, and doth begin to shake her skirts. Nay, Madam, what is it? cry I. Oh Oh, I do fear, it hath crept among my skirts, and will bite my knee. Come, Madam, this is but fancy, there is no bee. Oh Oh, cries Volumnia, 'tis on my knee, I do feel it against me; do you see it, sir, do you see it; and more shaking of skirts, wi' lifting to the knee. Nay, Madam, I see it not; yet do not stir up the creature, for then 'twill bite you sure. Oh Oh Oh, saith she, 'tis on my knee, pray kill it, sir, else I shall die of fright. Madam, I am well pleased, to be entrusted wi' such a task. And so saying, I did drop to one knee before her. Madam, quoth I, rising at once, I did see no bee; calm yourself, Madam, and all will be well. Oh Oh, cries she, 'tis flown higher; and forthwith much shaking of skirts, and girlish cries. Madam, I shall do all in my power, to save you; and so saying, I do clap my hand on her thigh. Oh Oh, 'tis not there, cries she. Madam, is it here? Oh Oh, 'tis not there neither, cries she. Madam, I now do feel somewhat, yet know I not, through thy clothes, whether 'tis a bee or no. Oh, sir, I know not, I know not, saith she, half-swooning against the tree, and I pressing all hot against her. Oh now do I feel it, cries she, oh 'tis a great bee, and will sting me; and doth turn aside her head, and put her hands on my neck. Madam, quoth I, 'tis but a humble-bee, which though it bite, yet hath great store of sweet honey; and so saying, I did take her hard against the tree, so that it rained down blossoms.

"Now when I had done, Madam, said I, the bee is flown away; and would have jested in such sort, save that Volumnia looked grave, and would say no word; but looking not at me, nor moving not at all, after some time she did start back slow along the path, not taking no notice o' me, nor talking neither. I was sore troubled, and did fear t'have lost all, by taking her so; and for she was but a maid, and bled fro' the bite o' the bee, I did 'gin to feel heavy at heart, for I had wooed her long, and o'ermastered me many a time, and loved her sore. All coldly did we take our way back, and coming t' the place where we must part, a little distance from the shepherd's cabin, there did we stop, both silent,

till I did say, Madam, I hope your sister doth feel better. Volumnia, who all the while had said no word, nor had not looked at me once, did at this seem somewhat to stir, and lifting her eyes, yet not to look at me, but as she were peering haughtily into the trees, coldly did say, I will wed you, sir, if you wish. Now at these words so icy uttered, a coldness did grip my heart, and my knees did quake, as I had heard a curse; yet did I lift her angelwhite hand and lightly kissing it say, Madam, it is my most deepest wish. So did she take her way, and I my way, all ice about the heart.

“ ‘Twas a hard night for me, lad, for more than once I did resolve, ne’er to return; yet when I could toss and turn no more, did I up and hie me t’ the wood, there to await Volumnia. I scarce knew what lay in heart or brain, so sore perplexed was I; yet had I fall’n into such long habit of meeting, as could not readily be foregone. Yet did I love the lass, in my way; and knew so little, what was jest, and what earnest, in all she said and did, as I must know, or toss forever. For ‘twas as if I’d drunk a potion, and that potion her; and I had spied her naked arse, which was sweet to my sight; and whether seducer or seduced, I scarce could tell, for though I was learned i’ the ways of vice, yet was I virtue’s drip-nose schoolboy. All which reasons fatally combining, did compel me towards her, though my mind was dark and my heart heavy. So all innocent was I led t’ slip my neck into the marriage noose, there to dangle undying while I was slit fro’ heart to belly and my guts drawn steaming forth.

5. Marriage in the Morphean Mode

“I’ll not vex thy hearing with all that passed, ‘twixt the time o’ my return to Volumnia and our all too memorable nuptial night; save to say only, ‘twas a time of great chastity, and much busyness, and more babble, as when the sublime day should come to pass, and where to live after, and a hundred such troublesome trifles that bade fair to put me out of patience; yet for chaste Volumnia’s fair sake I did strive to be sweet-tempered, and show a burning interest where I had none. What a devil cared I, whether we slept on silk cushions in a perfumed palace or lay in the mud of a stinking ditch, so I could plant my bonny bone i’ the belly o’ my bonibell? Yet would she plot, and plan, and try to outwit the future, and change her mind a hundred times, till I nigh burst with vexation, saying, Dear Volumnia, let be these vain plannings, sweet, but take time as it comes; whereupon she: Nay, sir, I see you are grown indifferent, and love me not. Nay, sweet, think not so, ‘tis but that time hath his way, and ‘ll not be forced where he’s no mind to go—thinking the while, ‘sdeath, an I loved not the lass so well,

I could find it in me not to like the sharp tip of her nose.

"So after many revolutions of thought, and dull debates on the virtues of solitude and society, the fair Volumnia did fix upon a wedding day, and resolve, that we would live alone i' the wood, and simply, we two; forwhy she had been reared in simple wise, and would live and love i' the Arcadian way. I was more of a mind to hie me t' the heart of Hypnopolis; yet sweetly consenting t' the Arcadian conceit, I soon hunted me out a mossy grot in a hill i' the wood, which I did in all secrecy prepare, not half a day's journey from the hut of the old shepherd her adoptive father; for the old dullard now being in his dotage, she'd not be far away. Aye, and mayhap feared to go off wi' fresh-reformed and new-moral Morpheus to an alien place; yet the lass being but young, I condemned not her whim. Before the cave was a babbling brook, and lofty trees, and in the woods round about a rustic hut or two, and paths, and streams, and little trilling birds, and what a devil else may suit the sylvan mode; for to speak true, old Morpheus doth love to go a-wenching i' the wood, but scarce can tell the difference 'twixt an acorn and a nightingale. Th'entrance o' the cave was hung round wi' vines and sweet-smelling flowers; and within was a pleasant chamber, with clean straw on the earthen floor, and strong walls of stone; and two smaller chambers behind, in one of which chambers I installed my trusty servant Pru, to cook and clean for us; for I knew not otherwise, how we should eat. For look thee, lad, Volumnia being reared in all comfort by the old shepherd and his daughter, preferred poets to pots and history to housewifery; and priding her on her Plato, could scarce peel a potato.

"We were married i' the shepherd's hut, t' the rasping tune of a rural pastor's pestiferous homily; a vexatious business, wi' much talk of holy vows; and swineherds gaping, and cowherds gasping, and shepherdesses sighing; and Olympia weeping to lose so fair a sister; then drink and dancing, and merry squeezing of buxom milkmaids; and at the last Volumnia and I off in a rattling cart wi' big wobbly wheels, drawn by a lankboned nag, and a shepherd with a battered hat at the reins; Volumnia thoughtful and dry-eyed as she waved goodbye. Come, Lady Morpheus, quoth I, a smile for thy husband; and bending towards her I did place my hand all husbandly upon her wifely bosom. Nay, sir, cries she, drawing back as she'd been slapped, is this how you treat me? Aye, Madam, quoth merry Morpheus; and I did give her a knowing grin. Sir, quoth she, you would mock me. Nay, Lady Morpheus, I would celebrate thee, on this holy day; and therewith reaching into my black velvet doublet—for I was dressed t' the teeth for my wedding, lad—I did remove a blushing bottle, wherewith to toast our nuptial day. Nay, halt, cries she, and not to me, but t' the hayseed at the reins; who drawing up short, Sir, saith she, I'll

not ride another inch, an you continue in this vein. 'Sdeath, cry I, then let's sit here unto all eternity, and let the world hang; for I'm i' the vein of happiness, that I have wed so fair a bride as thee; and here's to thee, and me, and we, and sweet fidelitee. And so saying, I did uncork the bottle, and take a nuptial nip; whereat the fair Volumnia made as if to step o'er the side o' the cart. Nay, hold, Madam, what a devil is this! Do you curse, wretch, and on our wedding day. Aye, Madam, I do curse the day, I did meet wi' virtue. 'Sdeath, lad, I know not what prophetic devil in me brought forth those words, which on the instant I deep regretted; and seeing her face appalled, I did fling the bottle into the woods, saying, Nay, Volumnia, 'tis but a poor jest; be not wroth wi' thy loving Morpheus, dear wedded wife, but come thou back i' good cheer, and forgive thy oer-ar-dent husband, who doth love thee sore, and doth but tease thee. Mayhap 'twas the urgency in my voice, did return her to me; yet thenceforth did we ride on in museful silence, and dark pensiveness.

" 'Tis said by some, that where the wedding-bottle o' Morpheus did fall, there in after times a great tree sprung up; and what man tasteth o' the fruit o' that tree, doth see such a vision, as maketh him to shun marriage from that day forth; and to live alone, all the days of his life.

"Come we at last t' the cave i' the hill. What ho, cry I, with a wave to Pru i' the entrance; and leaping high-spirited down fro' the cart, all gallantly I do help Volumnia down onto the path, saying the while, Come, sweet wife, and see thy new home. Off drives the cart, and I do lead Volumnia over the rude bridge across the stream, and along a short path t' the mouth o' the cave, where Pru stood to greet her new mistress. Methought Volumnia a trifle cold to her, yet gave it but passing notice; and all afire I did lead her into our nuptial nest. Sweet wife, quoth I, now welcome to our humble home; where I would lie down wi' thee, here i' the sweet straw; and had a speech in praise of sylvan solitude and bucolic beatitude all ready on my lips. Methought she looked all coldly and disdainfully about; and not casting her eyes upon me, Sir, quoth she, this jest is little to my liking. Jest, Madam, why, what a devil in hell mean'st thou by that word jest; nay, forgive me, sweet, I swore unwittingly; 'tis no jest, but such a cave, as thou didst wish for; full of sweet straw, and dry; then come, no more of this, for I would lie with thee. Quoth she, What, lie down i' the straw, husband? Pigs may lie down in straw, but not I. And so saying, she doth walk about, lifting her skirts as she were dragging her way through the mire.

" 'Sblood, lad, had I not been choked with rage, I could have laughed at the lass, who called herself a country wench yet thought pigs bedded in straw. I felt a devil rising in me, and would have

uttered I know not what folly, for I was grown heartily sick of marriage, and not a day wed; but comes me sweet Pru to the rescue, with silken pillows she had carried t' the cave fro' my bedchamber, for the lady to sit on, an her arse were ticklish; and a tray of dainties, and a pitcher of spring water. Volumnia o'ercoming her fit of temper, seemed sudden-gay; and sitting her down upon a pillow, like one playing a part upon the stage, she did speak in cheerful wise, yet as it seemed from out her will, and not from out her heart. The meal soon ended, Pru fetched forth a downy blanket, and wishing her mistress much happiness did take her leave. Then did Morpheus spread out the marriage blanket for his bride, and lay him gently down; and gazing fondly at his lawful wedded wife, bade her lie down by her husband's side.

"All coldly obedient she rose, ne'er looking at me, and comes round to where I and old pillicock lay; and glancing down as 'twere in anger at the place by my side, There sir? quoth she. Aye, quoth Morpheus, here by my side. Obedient, yet as unwilling, she doth lay her down upon her back, full clothed in her wedding gown, and close her eyes; lying like a stone statue by my side. 'Sdeath, methinks, what's this, would the lass play at modesty, and she stung by a bee? For look thee, lad, 'twas the very image of snowy virgin bashfulness, and she as much without a maidenhead as Medusa without a head. Well well, methinks, 'tis but the habit o' virtuous deportment and maidenly modesty, not so quick shed; and without more ado did fall upon her, with hot kisses and godly gropings. Volumnia lying motionless, did turn her face aside, as 'twere t'evade my mouth; keeping her legs close-clasped; scarce breathing the while; like as she would endure, what she could not well avoid. 'Sdeath, Madam, cry I, this likes me not; 'tis no fit 'haviour for a wife, and one not a maid. Do you mock me, husband, cries she, and makes to spring up, her eyes all fiery with hate. Nay, wife, I mock thee not, but I would call things as they are, and no harm; then come, take off thy clothes, and fret not, for the bee that bites twice, stings not. Nay, husband, saith the chaste Volumnia, an thou wouldst lie with me, must thou learn how to address a wife; for I see thou art still a wanton and a libertine, in some things. Nay, Madam, I knew not, there were rules to follow, in matters such as these; then instruct me, wife, in my husbandly duty, and I shall follow willingly, if it lead to thee. Then know, husband, that thou must not fall upon thy wife, like a lewd master upon a servant wench; but shouldst address her heart with soft words, and gentle looks, saying how thou dost love her; else art thou no husband, but a knave.

" 'Sdeath, lad, it little pleased me, to be instructed i' the art of love, by a wench on her back, i' the dark; yet mayhap by cause that I was new at husbanding, and knew not how it should be, and that I did take

a sort of pity on her, who was far from home, and at the mercy of such a one as I; so did I do her bidding, and 'gan to speak of love, and virtue, and such high matters; till waxing eloquent, I nigh forgot the fair Volumnia, and could have spouted love willingly to a doorpost. Y the midst of my feeling effusion it did come to pass, that looking down at Volumnia—for i' the heat of my love-talk I had sat bolt upright—I beheld her gaze fixed upon me; whereat I did see a something gin to glow i' the black coldness of her eyes; and her upper lip lifting like a cat's, she did draw up her wedding dress above her belly; which look and which updrawing did fever me so, as I thought I'd go mad wi' lust; and mounting her then, I did ram home with such fury, as I were a lad o' fifteen tumbling my first milkmaid i' the hay; mad-groping the while; and she thrusting back full wantonly, and giving cries o' pleasure; till come to the spending moment, I did pay in such measure, as to empty my bag; yet accounts once rendered, and I a beggar for her sake, lo, she did turn coldly from me, and would no more o' me, lying cold and silent and waking, as 'twere not she who'd done the deed, but another. Aye, she who but a moment before had danced a lusty measure, did now shudder to be touched; all as she were ashamed of what had passed, and would deny it. Then did a coldness creep into my bones. For look thee, lad, old Morpheus doth love the thumping game most heartily; yet the deed once done, hath he a craving for softer music, such as might soothe the soul. Yet did the virtuous Volumnia spurn me, and turn her back to me, and give me not so much as a little look; leaving me discontented, and sore vexed to know, what I should have done, or might do. So passed my wedding night; till after long waking, I fell into the arms o' Morpheus.

"I know not how long I lay asleeping, but when I woke, 'twas broad day. Then did I look about in wonder, knowing not where I lay. For lo, I saw before me a fine table, wi' legs carved like lions; and rich store of books, on polished shelves; and curtains o' damask; and a little yellow bird in a golden cage. And rubbing my eyes, and sitting up, like one transported t' the faery realm, lo, I did behold Volumnia, near th'entrance o' the cave, holding a painting against a wall. Good morrow, husband, saith she, I hope thou hast slept well; yet now methinks 'tis time to rise, and lend thy hands to this work. Then did I learn, how that as I lay in sleep, the fair Volumnia waking betimes, had sent Pru to fetch cart and driver; which soon done, she did hasten home to her lowly shepherd's hut; and there loading the cart wi' tables and chairs and devil I know not what from her rude lodging, she did return, and gin to furnish out our cave, bringing as 'twere the court into Arcady. 'Slid, she had marvelous store of fine stuffs, and silken hankers, and tables carved and polished, all from that high-toned whore her mortal mother, who shortly before disencumbering herself

of her maidenhead had coaxed from her godly ravisher great store of worldly goods, mayhap to keep her company towards that time she and virtue should part. Why, lad, there was a thick carpet of red wool, woven wi' threads o' silver and gold, which carpet Volumnia needs must lay in our cave, after sweeping out the straw. So and in such wise did the fair Volumnia civilize our cave.

"So did we live, I and my wedded wife, i' the humble cave i' the wood; and there did I become knowing i' the ways of husbandhood, far beyond my most ardent dreams.

"For look thee, lad, in my wooing days, I had fondly imagined marriage a sweet continuing o' my former state, with a wife thereunto added.

O lambwhite Morpheus! 'Sdeath, I was innocent as a schoolboy, a very virgin o' marriage. Why, I'd scarce thought on't at all, save that once married I could tup her to my heart's content, and gazing on her naked arse think myself virtuous. For as it seemed me, wedded is bedded and wived is swived, and Virtue, thy name is Morpheus. Nay, once wived, methought virtue would as 'twere come to me willingly, all smiling and loose-robed; nor did I suspect how that same virtue would flee from me ever, seek her as I might.

" 'Twas not long, ere I learned how marriage is no free commonwealth, but a state monarchical, and that state ruled by a queen. 'Tis a state doth have his laws and commandments, which commandments had I known beforehand, beshrew me but I'd sooner have hied me to Hades and spun with Ixion on his fiery wheel than bound me blissfully in velvet chains o' virtue. And these be the commandments o' marriage, which I did learn. Thou shalt not increase thy soul's delight wi' pressed juice o' the grape, but shalt walk in sobriety all the days o' thy wife. Thou shalt not suffer stinking tobacco to befoul the sweet air. Thou shalt not sleep to thy heart's happiness, and thy body's need, nor lie flat on thy back in meditation upon the mystery o' things, but shalt be up and doing, like unto the pismire, the beaver, and the busy bee. Thou shalt not leave the side o' thy loving wife for the society of riotous companions. Thou shalt not suffer foul stinks to issue from thy body, nor foul sounds from thy mouth, but shalt smell like a rose, and talk like pious Aeneas. Thou shalt not pinch lovingly the chaste rump o' thy wedded wife, which 'haviour is immodest and unseemly. Thou shalt not wanton wi' thine eyes, nor gaze admiringly upon thy neighbor's wife's rump. Thou shalt not curtain thy most secretest thoughts from out the sight o' thy curious wife, but shalt make of thy heart a pleasant garden, wherein two may walk lovingly, side by side. 'Sdeath, I know not what marriage may be, there in thy realm; but 'twas as if the fair Volumnia would sunder me from my self, leaving naught i' the world but her; and that was

marriage. So one by one did my former ways fall from me, and my life contract, till all was Volumnia; for she did say, true marriage was a world, and needed naught but two souls.

"Think not I yielded without protestation, lad. 'Sdeath, it oft seemed, she'd unman me, to make me husband. What, thought I, is Morpheus a spaniel, to be led by the leash? Yet by degrees I did yield me, and for three reasons. Now the first was this, that though I loved not marriage, finding him an officious and pedantical wretch, and would fain have wrung his neck, yet did I love the lass, for whose fair sake I was become a husband. The second was this, that having grown someddeal sensible to virtue, by reason of proximity to the virtuous Volumnia, yet thereby did I the more feel me beneath her in that very virtue, for love of which I'd married her; and so would make myself worthy, in her sight. And the third was this, that though I did please myself upon her, and tup her lustily, yet was there a want of something, which want troubled me sore, and made me hot to try her again. For look thee, 'twas as if i' the very act of having her, I lost her, I knew not how. Think not she was cold-cunted, lad. Nay, 'twas a lusty whore of a virtuous wife, and could buck wi' the best, as pleased old pillicock well; yet the pleasure over, would she grow sudden-cold, and turn her back to me, and not be touched; as on my wedding night. Why, she seemed two women, one hot and lusty, the other cold. Nay, 'twas as if she would deny the deed o' darkness, annihilating it when 'twas done, and mayhap hating me for having been witness to her wildness. Who was I, poor innocent lecherous Morpheus, t'unravel the heart of a virtuous wife?

"Nay, worse: save for the hot deed itself, which melted her, she had in all things a cold reserve more suited to a maid than a well-swived wife. Why, man, she'd not let me look upon her, undressing; nor spy upon her naked body; which coyness did so enflame and fever me, as to make me a lecher o' mine own wife, casting secret lascivious looks upon her when her eyes were for a moment averted, e'en spying on her i' the dark, when she slept, or when half-waking she rose fro' sleep and stumbled fro' bed at the bidding of base nature. Aye, then would I list to her piddling i' the pot, which unclean thing she had removed behind a curtain; yet could she not muzzle up the sound, whereto I listened all enflamed, to think so decorous a wife should piss like any sow. Nay, she did carry modesty so far, as to come to bed all clothed in a night gown, that did reach to her feet; having first removed her outer clothes behind a curtain. She was cold to my groping, and disdainful; as 'twere the lewd fumbling of an illbred boy. Nay, sir, she'd say, it likes me not, and pull back wi' tight nostrils and a cold fire burning in her black eye-pits.

" 'Sdeath, methought she hated me then; and though I had no love

for these ways, which methought ill suited a wife, yet would I not force her t' the deed, but strove to melt her i' the manner of her own liking, with gentle words, and strokes o' the face; my hands not straying below her chaste neck, save at the melting moment, when I roved wildly where I would. For she had this little peculiarness, that high-flown love-talk did in time moisten her below; whereat the glow did kindle in her eyes; and her upper lip then lifting, she would full wantonly draw up her gown above the thick-thatched place. Aye, then the smack o' belly on belly was sweet to my ears; but the little episode once past, she would none of me, and cl turn away coldly, as one who hated the snake in her grass. For though her lower nature o'ercame her, and warmed her t' the deed, yet did her high virtue triumph the stronger, the more she felt herself o'ermastered. So did I whore after mine own chaste wife, feeling deep-wronged, yet feeling base to feel so wronged; yearning to enter not her belly only, but the dark and secret places of her Morpheus-denying spirit; and always hungry and dissatisfied.

"Yet was this not all, that nubilated the cerulean of my heaven-seeming connubiation. For to speak true, I and the chaste Volumnia saw not eye to eye in some things. Thou know'st old Morpheus hath an easy temper, and is well content to let be, admitting into's company any blackhearted rogue or lily-souled saint, save him only, who would wish him harm; yet did Volumnia differ from her husband by nothing so much as this, that she was of the reforming kind. 'Sdeath, lad, marriage to me was reformation enow; nay, 'twas reformation himself. What a devil had I to do with improving me beyond the condition of a husband? Yet was Volumnia so zealous for my sake, as to be ne'er satisfied, mend me as I might; and would not leave instructing me, first by speeches, then by speaking looks. Aye, well she knew how to reprove me with an eyebrow, condemn me with a nostril, and damn me wi' the tremor of a tight-tensed lip. For look thee, lad, though Volumnia had wedded me, yet did she disapprove o' me; mayhap wedded me forwhy she disapproved o' me, and would reform me. I being so ta'en by her high virtue, did strive to mar myself, making myself un-Morpheus for her sake; yet by how much the more she reformed me, by so much the less could I find approval in her eyes. For though I banished my boon companions, to devote my sole self to her, yet was my drunkenness a disgrace; though I turned dry and sober as a thistle, yet did I sleep too late; though I sprang me up betimes, yet were my manners in sore need o' mending; my manners well-mended, yet was my speech too free. Nay, mend me as I would, she'd find more that wanted mending, like as I were a threadbare coat. A very something in my manner of sitting, did seem to offend her; for 'twas as if she disapproved, not of this and that, but of Morpheus

himself. So did I strive to improve me, and raise myself in her eyes; yet did I feel misused the while; and dull anger growing.

“ ‘Sdeath, I mean not to paint myself too sweet. Was not mighty Caesar deaf in’s left ear? Had not smooth-conquering Alexander a scar in’s cheek? Had not Aristippus his wart? Lycurgus his wen? Cyrus his hooked nose? Hath not Venus her mole? The smoothest velvet hath his brack, the finest crystal his crack. Helen was passing fair, yet was she a little forgetful in some things. Aye, e’en the sweetest leper hath his spots. Now as the rose hath his thorns, and toes their corns: e’en so had Morpheus, that perfect pattern of a creeping husband, some faint flaw in the water of his moral diamond. I did strive to reform me, and mend my tattered ways, yet now and again did I hearken to base promptings o’ my unreformèd nature; for though I was kept close in my Arcadian prison, yet did my sweet jailer sometimes permit me to roam a little beyond the cave, to fetch berries, and mushrumps, and wood for the fire. Then o’erturning a rock, I would chance to find a weed thereunder planted; and coming to a cool, transparent stream, lo, I would spy a glassy object therein gleaming; and sitting me down ‘neath a greenwood tree, I would drink deep, and smoke long, giving a guilty start at the slightest creak i’ the forest. Yet e’en so did moral Morpheus struggle with himself, saying: why, thou fat rogue, thou didst pledge on thy honor as a husband, to give up drunkenness, yet dost thou drink. Aye, but ‘tis not drink she doth abhor, but drunk; for when ‘tis water I drink, she doth not frown at me; yet drinking water, I do drink. So doth she excommunicate not drink, but drunk. Yet what is this same word drunk? Is’t not made fro’ the past o’ the verb? Yet did I promise future reformation. So then: drink is tense present, and drunk is tense past; I do drink now, and in future will drink; I drunk in time past, and then was drunk, yet did I not promise t’amend the past, but the future only. Then drink, good Morpheus; moral Morpheus, drink; nor fear not that that drink, which is present, can conduct to drunk, which is past; all which time I do heartily abhor. Aye, there’s grammar for thee. Marry, and such answer to a philosophical riddle as would please your lover of truth: for ‘tis necessary I drink; and I would drink; and so I do drink; and there hast thou necessity and free will walking hand in hand i’ the forest. So debating with myself, I did drink and smoke to my heart’s content, and after wash my mouth i’ the stream, and chew on leaves, looking about all guiltily.

“Aye, e’en i’ the chaste bosom of my home, base nature did come breaking out; for though I did twist and wrench me into husbandly obedience, yet did I so now and again with a subtle mocking air, that seemed t’undo, what Volumnia had thought done. For Morpheus is no lamb, though he doth love to gamble; and though he be sweet, yet his douce is wild. Aye, once she was vexed so sore, to see me make silent

mock of her, that she did burst into bitter tears. Then was my heart rent, to see the lass weep so, for I did love her, and would be loved by her. So did I strive all the more, to make myself high in her eyes.

"Now the chaste Volumnia, though perfect in all things, and admirable beyond the fondest wishes of a doting husband, did yet have, I'll not say flaws, nor imperfections, which words wrong her, but some few perfections less glowing than all the rest; and amongst these dimmer perfections, the which did set off her shining perfections as black velvet doth bring out the flash of a diamond, were her suspiciousness and jealousy.

"Thou dost recall, how upon that first day, she was somedeal cold to Pru, and disdainful. 'Twas in part her nature, for she being lofty in virtue, and conversant wi' things o' the upper air, did i' the natural way o' things cast her gaze downward, when she would see another. Yet 'twas the case as well, that Pru had been brought there by me. Nay, worse, had known me, and that before Volumnia had e'er set reforming eyes on me. Now she being mistrustful, and disliking all that time, wherein I drew breath without her loving guidance, did conceive so strong an aversion to Pru, as to find continual fault with her, comparing her unflatt'ringly to Olympia, and saying how she did boil the vegetables too long time, or curtsied not low enough, or was intruding at all hours—nay, it mattered not, Pru was still to blame. Nay, worse, she did 'gin to see dark design where there was naught but loyal service. For she did say, how that Pru did plot to supplant her i' the management o' the cave, and how that she did scheme wi' me against her, taking my side in all things. Aye, 'twas soon apparent unto me, Volumnia was jealous o' faithful Pru, with her wrinkled face and gray hair, and liked not the easy way I had with my servant. For look thee, lad, I did joke and laugh wi' Pru, and carry on familiarly, as is my way; why, I did love her, in a fashion, and did love to tease her, and make her laugh; the more so, as Volumnia had a stern and sober cast o'mind, that made her to mistrust mirth, and fail in following th'intent of many a joke; save learned word-play, and such high matters.

"Comes me a day, when waking betimes, I did drag my weary way t' the breakfast table, where sweet Volumnia sat waiting for me with a cold and disapproving look; for rouse me early as I might, 'twas ne'er early enough. 'Swounds, an I had been Chanticleer, and sprung up to crow at the dawn, she'd ha' looked daggers at me, forwhy I sprung not up betimes to crow at the moon. And there as I sat, lo! in steps a wrinkled hag, bearing a breakfast tray. What's this, quoth I, where's Pru? Quoth Volumnia, I have dismissed her. Dismissed her, Madam! What a devil dost thou mean, dismissed her? I see thou art out of temper, husband. Aye, wife, and out of a servant too. 'Sdeath,

and wherefore dismissed her, pray? For ill performing of her duties, and insolent manners; but come, let's eat. Nay, Madam, I'll not eat — and throwing down my napkin I did storm out in a passion. All that day did I go araging through the woods, cursing at stones, railing at babbling brooks, and shaking my fist at noble oaks; and did resolve, to have Pru back, and assert my will 'gainst uxorial usurpation. I did return, and th'upshot was, Volumnia had her way. For she did say, she could not suffer Pru; and I might have one or th'other, but not both; nay, and argued further, how we two took sides against her, and made her to feel alone. In such wise did she slow turn me fro' my fixed purpose; for though she did invent and amplify, yet was there a measure of truth in all she said; for not to hide it from thee, lad, 'twas loyal Pru who slipped me a merry bottle i' the cool stream, and buried cigars under marked stones. And knowing my deceitfulness, I was the more readily turned fro' my purpose; for as the rational powers do decline with influxion of spiritous liquors, so was my will grown weak with infusion o' virtue.

"Yet jealousy's a starv'ling doth feed on any scrap. Volumnia soon finding me too familiar wi' the hag, doth replace her with an ugly bent-backed crone, with a fair wen on her neck and the look of a piece of sour cheese. Yet soon suspecting I did grow amorous, she sent her on her way. Now did I witness succession of such loathly ladies as to make old Morpheus think he was dwelling i' the horror chamber of a waxwork museum. Methought she must scour the woods for witches, and bring home the worst. Yet let me lift but an eyelash t'observe the latest humpback, so did Volumnia see therein the hatching of a passion. 'Sdeath, I was so circumscribed and suspected, and so wary o' casting a glance anywhere save at my chaste Volumnia, that I did begin to think myself lecherous. Aye, once did I wake from a dream, wherein I lifted the black dress of a withered hag, and near melted wi' desire. Yet for Volumnia was there no end of annoy, forwhy these crippled hags did spill and break things, and move so confounded slow as scarce to be of service. So on a day she did bring in a strapping wench, but so ill-favored as to look half an ape; yet one stray glance from Morpheus at her harelip, and fair Helen was out. Then did Volumnia endeavor to make do without a maid; yet was the lass so spoiled she scarce knew how to boil a turnip; and fretting and worrying herself into distraction, on a sudden she did hit upon a scheme, which seemed in one stroke t'o'ercome all troubles, and remove all doubts away.

"For on a day Volumnia roaming the wood farther than was her wont, did come upon two dwarves, man and wife, who lived in a rude hut, with but a single room; and falling into talk, she did invite them to return with her to our cave, and there dwell, preparing our meals, and

cleaning our chamber, in exchange for such comforts as our rich grotto could provide. By this bold scheme Volumnia did hope to achieve three ends. She did hope to secure able help, for the pair were strong and hardy, though scarce three foot high. She did hope to prevent a league of two against one, and secret plottings, such as she fancied t'occur when a single wench entered service. Yet most of all, she did hope relief fro' jealousy; for the wench was a dwarf, the wench was ill-favored, and the wench was wed. I protested not, forwhy I wished an end to suspicion and foolish scenes; and truth to tell, I was a little weary of sylvan solitude, and did welcome company of any sort. Now the wee wench was called Rosabella; and Scurlock, the little man.

6. *Scurlock*

"This Scurlock was the most devilish sweet rogue my heart e'er warmed to. Why, the mere bold look o' the proud little rascal was enough to drive off the melancholy. He stood twenty-nine inches high, and every inch a scoundrel. 'Twas a dashing little devil of a man, wi's flashing black eyes and's swept-back hair; and his ruddy Vandyke conjoined to's trim mustachios did circle a pair o' fine disdainful lips, which sudden-parted in a smile did show as perfect a row o' bright white teeth as e'er flashed from a face. He had a trim hard manly little figure, and a fine pride of leg withal. 'Sdeath, I loved to see him strut and swagger, in's black hose and velvet doublet. Yet for all that he was proud as a pirate, the little man was accomplished in courtesy, skilled in service, and quick in knowing what thing unspoke was wished of him. He had a polished manner did make its mark on Volumnia; could be graceful and deferential; spake well; and knew when to hold his tongue.

" 'Twas soon a custom, dinner being done, that the four of us would sit and talk in a companionable corner o' the main chamber; and then did I feel more cheer i' the cave, than had warmed it ever. Mayhap it hath not eluded thy notice, how old Morpheus hath a little weakness for talk. Yet after a short span o' marriage had I fall'n into the way of silence wi' the voluble Volumnia; for though she was fond of expatiating, expostulating, remonstrating, and Volumniating, yet truth to tell she had little i' the way of true conversation, forwhy she knew not the world. Now this sweet rascal Scurlock was a talker after mine own heart; for he did have quick wit, drollness of phrase, ready flow of argument, and much knowledge o' the world. Yet was he someddeal circumspect in speech, and seemed to trim his talk t' the domestic hearth; and his eye knew more than his tongue did tell. He kept close about himself, save to say only, how he had served a prince

i' th'upper realm, which prince having wronged him, he did return t' the lower realm, where his race were born, and for the most part lived. Rosabella said but little, and that to Volumnia, yet hung on his every word. Scurlock seemed scarce to notice her, save to speak sharp to her; for though he spake courteously to Volumnia, yet was he master of his wife, as I could well see.

"Volumnia growing by degrees more friendly with Rosabella, and trusting me to range from out the prison of her sight, I by little and little did fall into fellowship wi' Scurlock, chatting with him i' the cave when the women were out, or roaming the woods in's company when the women were in. Thou know'st well, lad, how talk 'twixt man and man doth flow more free, when petticoats be away. Ah, how my heart warmed to him then, to see what a consummate hypocrite he was! Why, he did delight my soul wi's bawdy tales and worldly ways. He had a thousand quaint words for wenches and their parts, and did love to boast of's conquests amongst what he called the unbung'd sex. We'd sit us down under a shady tree, and the rogue reaching into's pocket would pull out a little flask—aye, he could drink wi' the best, and show naught after but a flush under the eyes. He did tell me how, at the prince his master's, he did in time feed many a squirrel wi' nuts, thus serving three ladies in waiting and the princess too; for women did find him sweet, and loved to pet him like a dog; but they did learn, 'twas a dog with a bone to bury. Yet did he maintain, for sheer wantonness there was nothing like your female dwarf, who knew twenty tricks t' pleasure a man, and was ever cunning i' the ways o' lechery. Then did he praise what he was pleased to call Rosabella's squirrel, the devilish sweet rogue; yet did he say, a man who snaked his wife only, was a fool; for an a wife suspected her husband o' fidelity, she'd straight lose all respect for him and turn whore. The rascal did carry on in this wise, such as did please me mightily; for since my wedding day I'd reined me in so tight I scarce could breathe.

"I did readily hold mine own wi' Scurlock, in narrating of amorous adventures, and passing the small coin of hard bright talk; yet did I feel a secret envy o' the little man, who though married, was not marred. So i' the natural course of things, on a day I did come to speak o' my marriage. I told o' Volumnia's disdainful bearing, and her little trick o' turning away at night, and such matters; feeling disloyal to Volumnia the while, for I was still virtuous in my fashion, yet so melancholy I could not keep silence. Scurlock listened close, and methought with a trace of scorn; and expressing surprise, did say, he knew not how it might be among the gods, but if Rosabella played him such scurvy tricks as those, he'd take his hand to her; for, quoth he, when all's said and done, a wife's but a domestic whore, and her place is on her back; and a husband is no partner in a contract, but a lord to

be obeyed in all things. A husband that failed to master a wife, quoth he, was like a boy who cannot teach a dog to heel; and who's to blame, if boy or husband be bit? I did protest but feebly; for his words did find an echo in my soul. Then did he laugh love to scorn, saying 'twas but a word fit for women and children, and correspondent to no thing; for he could show me a piece of gold, but could I show him love? He did further say, how that he valued a piece of gold more than any thing; and he would lend his wife for gold, could he strike such a bargain. Then did old Morpheus laugh till the tears ran down, to hear the wicked wag talk so; and I did say, in jesting wise, how I cared not a fig for gold, and would pay any man, could I purchase love.

"That same night, dinner being done, the excellent sweet rogue did wax most eloquent in praise of love, quoting copiously from authors ancient and modern, the while old Morpheus nigh choked to keep his laughter in; for I did warm t' the witty audacious devil, loving the wild bad heart of him.

"Volumnia looking favorably on my friendship wi' such a well-spoke judicious fellow, and thinking his high talk likely to have an improving influence on my sore beset soul, did encourage our closeness; th'upshot being, I did 'gin to roam in thought, though still held in deed by loosening chains o' virtue.

"Now e'er since the time Scurlock had spake o' the wantonness o' dwarves, and extolled Rosabella's squirrel, I was grown curious, and did look on Rosabella with new eyes. The wench was dark and ill-favored, wi' leathern skin and springy black hair and a fleshy little nose; her legs had a stubby look, seeming too short; 'sdeath, she put me in mind of a bowlegged monkey. Yet now did I note certain signs in her I'd o'er-looked before. She was indifferent in dress, wearing always a plain black smock of some coarse stuff, gathered at the waist with a simple belt o' straw; yet as she bustled about, bending this way and that with her feather duster, I did spy a fullness of hip and roundness of rumpkin, did much take me; and there was a sturdy suppleness about the wench, a nimbleness, such as methought did promise for Scurlock much delight. Nay, more, I 'gan t' imagine the nakedness o' the wee she, how hilled, how furrowed, and how bushed; and the little-girl size of her, and the womanly mold of her, did soon enflame me into lascivious longing.

"On a day I being ta'en sick of a cold, and Volumnia desiring to visit the old shepherd her adoptive father, Scurlock did offer, to drive her i' the cart; saying only, he did hope Rosabella would take care not to displease me in his absence, and in all things to be as good as gold. The two driving off, I remained abed wi' hot compresses, honeyed tea, and the works o' Plato. 'Twas a fat book fro' mine own shelves, wi' this singularity, that it did contain rare texts not commonly attributed by

narrow pedantical scholars to that sublime lover of truth; as *Confessions of a Country Maid*, *The Sultana's Secret: or A Peep Under the Purdah*, *The Tale of Tom Tickler*, *Cock Robin and Lady Wren*, and *Fanny Wiggleton*. Our marriage bed, carted fro' the shepherd's cottage what time Volumnia reformed our cave, was o' the curtained kind, and stood at one end o' the room; and the curtains standing open, I had but to raise my eyes, to survey all the rich-furnished chamber. 'Twas Rosabella's task, to sweep out the cave, dust the tables, and catch spiders; and fro' time to time I did cast my eye secretly at the wench, as she bustled about with her feather duster and her broom.

"She spake but little, as was her wont. The silence, and the bustle, and the worm in my brain, did so conspire, as to make me wax impatient and cross-tempered; and shutting my book I did ask Rosabella to fetch me more tea. She fetched it readily, and holding the long feather duster o'er one little shoulder did ask, was there aught else I desired. Quoth I, the bolster irks me. She bidding me lean forward did reach up t' grapple wi' the pillow, for she was scarce above two foot high; yet that failing, she did climb nimbly onto the bed, standing beside the pillow to beat and round it into shape, the while her smock did brush the sleeve o' my robe. This done, and I leaning back, she stood there free and easy on the bed beside me with her hand on her hip, her ankle being not three inches fro' my hand, and asked, did master Morpheus wish aught else to be done. Nay, I knew of no thing; but 'twas vexatious, to be ill, and in bed. The bed's lumpish, quoth she. Aye, plaguy lumpish, quoth I, 'tis like lying on coals. Then said she, how her husband could ne'er sleep, when there was a bone i' the bed. Aye, quoth Morpheus, aye, 'tis uncommon vexatious; and I do long to know, how man or god can sleep, an there be a bone i' the bed. Nay, said she, 'tis not possible, till the bone be buried. But first, quoth I, must the bone be found. Oh that's easy, said she, for you must feel about. Nay, I can feel no thing, quoth I, forwhy I am weak wi' this cold; but do thou find it for me, pray. Why, that's easy, quoth she, for I do see it. And so saying she doth bend over and clap her hand on my bone.

" 'Sdeath, lad, 'twas the end o' virtue; and taking her then i' the marriage sheets, I did marvel at the little wanton, with what art she knew how to bury a bone. 'Slid, she had a burying ground such as I'd not known in an immortality o' wenching. She had an art I'd ne'er seen in a wench, to make her squirrel wide or tight at will, and all practiced in such skill as to prolong pleasure t' the utmost; and like many a two-headed woman, well she knew, how to feed wi' four lips. After, she crawled atop me and fell asleep, lying curled up on my belly like a cat. 'Twas then I felt the full sting o' my damnable union wi' the virtuous Volumnia; for though Rosabella was but a coarse wench, and

loved me not, yet was there a frankness in her pleasure did please me mightily, and a sweetness in her 'haviour I'd long missed; for following her nature, she turned not coldly from me, but held to me, when the storm was done.

"Volumnia late returning, in lowness o' spirits for that the old shepherd was ailing and Olympia at her wits' end, did find me abed wi' Plato, and Rosabella preparing supper. Scurlock then entering did make courteous enquiry, whether I was well served in his absence, and wanted for any thing. I did reply full courteously, saying I had ne'er been so well served, and wanted for naught; thanking him for his solicitude, and praising Plato as one whose works did erect the soul, and whose noble philosophy, truly considered, was i' the nature of an ejaculatory prayer to Heaven. Volumnia retiring early to bed, and Rosabella soon following, I did seat me in a soft chair at a far corner o' the main chamber, where I spake awhile in low tones wi' Scurlock, enquiring of him the conditions o' the roads, the health o' the old shepherd, and such matters. Scurlock replied most courteously. Shortly before retiring he did say, that his affairs having ta'en a bad turn of late, he found himself in some small embarrassment. Whereat I reaching into an inner pocket o' my robe, drew forth a small leathern pouch; and removing fro' the pouch a small gold piece, I did place it i' the little dark palm of his hand, saying how I hoped his affairs would soon be in good order. Scurlock replying that the shrewdest wit could but dim-glimpse the course of Fate, which did erect one soul only to fling another on her back, enquired again anent my health, and then retired.

"Fro' that time forth I did contrive to be alone wi' Rosabella some portion of each day, boarding her i' the wood or i' the cave, and settling my account wi' Scurlock by night. The rogue did keep strict reckoning, as I quick learned, for when I'd tupp'd her twice, he would frown and sigh, complaining of's affairs till I'd placed another gold piece in's palm; and once after a vigorous day i' the wood, he ceased not his plaining till five pieces had passed into's pocket. 'Sdeath, I grudged it not, but laughed to see the rascal grow horns for gold. We ne'er spake of't, and in truth were not so much together as before; and though he seemed well pleased to roam the woods wi' me, yet was there some slight constraint betwixt us, and less freedom of talk.

"Volumnia showing no semblance o' suspicion, yet seemed oft pensive and sad; and I did fear her prying nature so, as t'evade all intimate talk with her. On a night she seemed in especial desirous to speak, but I pleading tiredness did feign sleep; and thereafter said she no word, nor e'er looked at me wi' the eyes o' jealousy; yet seemed she not herself, but oft downcast.

"I loved not Rosabella, yet was touched by her simple nature; for

she did come to me uncomplaining, and do all my bidding, and turn not from me i' the dark. She loved me not, though liked me and e'en doted on me; she spake o' Scurlock but rarely, yet I saw she loved the rogue, though he did mistreat her. Scurlock taking care to give me much time wi' Rosabella, proved most ingenious in contriving of occasions whereby to lead Volumnia away; urging her to go for a walk i' the wood, or reading to her from Plotinus when she wished to stay within. We trysted the more easily, for that Volumnia at this time did oft hie her t' the ailing shepherd, driven by Scurlock i' the cart. My adultery did greatly improve my marriage, for stung by guilt I was outwardly attentive to Volumnia, doing her least bidding gladly, arguing in no thing, and striving to please her as well as I might. Yet at night did I feel but small desire for her, and touching her not, nor saying no word, did fall asleep; and she not protesting, we fell into a cold habit of chastity, as we were sisters, sharing the same bed. And I did conceive a tenderness towards her, for that I wronged her, and she knew it not.

"Now a day came, when Volumnia having a headache, and remaining abed, I went into the wood with Rosabella; and finding a secluded place, did lay me down, and take my pleasure. Then feeling a great hunger, I bade Rosabella remain, whilst I returned t' the cave for bread and cheese. And as I approached the cave, my heart smote me, that I did forsake Volumnia in her illness, and dally while she lay sick. I sighed, and thought on Virtue, how it had fall'n away; and stepping softly within the cave, in hope of not being spied, I did see the drawn bedcurtain, and hear a suffering moan within. Then did conscience prick me so, as to make me tiptoe o'er; and stealthily drawing aside the curtain, I did peer within, to see how she fared in my absence. There did I see Volumnia lying on her back with eyes tight shut, and Scurlock stark naked atop her, thrusting lustily away. The sight so numbed me, I stood gaping like a ninny, scarce able to feel. That devil Scurlock feeling my eyes like burning coals on's back, leaped up fro' the greasy nest, his tool red and slick, his face twisted in rage. Then did a fire blaze in my brain, and I reached for the wretch, but he twisted away with a shriek of hate; and snatching a chinking pouch that lay by his clothes, he darted naked fro' the bed and dashed past me to the cavemouth, Volumnia wailing the while. There halting, for he saw I followed not, he flung back his head and looked at me with all the pride and hate of his fiery malignant heart; and reaching into his moneybag he tossed upon the floor a small copper coin; then turned and was gone.

"Then did a madness seem to come o'er me, and rushing into his chamber I picked up chairs and smashed 'em into splinters against the wall; kicked a table to pieces; emptied drawers from a little chest and

smashed 'em one by one; whereby remarking i' the bottommost drawer a silk stocking o' Volumnia's, I was stung to wilder rage; till the room reduced to wreckage, on a sudden my wildness left me, and I sat me down i' the ruins, like one who knows not where he is, nor why.

7. *Virtue Rewarded*

"Scurlock ne'er returned t' the cave, nor Rosabella neither. The storm once passed, my marriage entered upon a time of great tranquillity. The chaste Volumnia feeling deep-shamed to ha' been caught with her virtue down, would at first speak no word anent her fall; yet did it come creeping out, how she had scurlocked me many a sweet time, though always sore troubled in spirit. So mayst thou see, there's balance in Nature, lad; for all the while her lower parts were pricked wi' pleasure, her high parts were pricked wi' pain. She did in course of time relate, how Scurlock in my absence oft spake to her of love, yet all sweetly and purely, the which did much incline her to him; the more so, as I began to neglect her o' nights. She did remember her, how on a day I being ta'en sick with a cold, Scurlock drave her t' the old shepherd's i' the cart; whence returning in low spirits, she let him kiss her chastely on the cheek, ne'er thinking carnally of him; for he was but a dwarf, though well-bred and handsome. Yet she being neglected by me o' nights, and avoided by day, was much thrown on his company; and love-speeches leading to cheek-kisses, cheek-kisses to patting of arms, patting of arms to finger-touches, finger-touches to amicable clips, and amicable clips to amatory clasps, she did grow slowly familiar with him, till on a day coming to her as she lay abed, he did lead her on wi' love-talk and friendly caresses till by slow degrees he had slipped inside her, as 'twere by an oversight.

"She had suffered a sore conscience, and knew not what to do. So after long struggle, on a night she ventured to confess. Yet would I not hear her, feigning sleep; seeming thereby to cast her upon Scurlock, and condemn her to adultery. She did further say, that though the little man loved her sore, and was wholly devote unto her, and had ne'er loved another, yet she loved him not; but would not abuse him to me, saying he was gentle with her, and kind. He argued 'twas not adultery, forwhy they were not o' the same race; yet she saw he believed it not, but said it to allay her pangs. She did feel pity for him, forwhy he did tell her how Rosabella, being injured at birth, could lie with no man. He spake but little o' me, yet highly when at all; calling me always his friend.

"When I did ask, how he pleased her wi's little red poker, she did

blush, and grow confused, like unto a maid; for she could ne'er speak o' such things, but of love only, like as the deed itself were but th'insane and gibbering monkey of mild-eyed Lady Love. Yet did she say, she liked his eyes, and his hands, and his voice, which was most musical; and did pity him, that he was but a dwarf.

" 'Sdeath, I was half-crazed wi' jealousy, and could scarce keep from discov'ring to her his treacherous low dealing, and how he lied, and mocked love, and sold his wife for gold. Yet did I ne'er expose his baseness to her, nor confess my guilt; and this for three reasons. Now the first was this, that I was ashamed to say, I had bought any man's wife for gold. And the second was this, that I wished to keep th'advantage, of once not being i' the wrong; for I did mark, how e'en now Volumnia, though she was shamed, made no apology, nor asked forgiveness, but sought t'excuse herself by some fault in me, as my neglect of her; which boded ill for truth. And the third was this, that I did scruple to speak spitefully 'gainst Scurlock; for though I would readily have killed him, and thought it just, yet would I not whisper womanishly against him; for I had once loved him, though he betrayed me.

"And I did wonder long, and ponder hard, why he had spun a tale about Rosabella, and revealed not to Volumnia, how I deceived her. Now mayhap he wished her to pity him, wi's tale o' not lying wi's wife. And mayhap he did feel shame, and would not speak of selling his wife for gold, or being a willing cuckold. Yet could I not rest content wi' these reasonings, and it would come creeping into my mind, how though Scurlock acted treacherously to me, yet did he love me in his fashion; and would not speak tales against me, though he betrayed me. Nay, more, I did sometimes wonder, whether or no he had in truth betrayed me. For we had mocked love together, and laughed at wives, and roamed the wood in bawdy fellowship, we two; and I seeming indifferent to Volumnia, mayhap a silent understanding had seemed to grow.

"So did my thoughts turn, and the nights pass, and I confessed not my guilt.

"Twas a time o' great tenderness, though short-lived, for shame and guilt conspired to hatch a happy marriage: Volumnia's shame keeping down her disapproval, and Morpheus' guilt making him an excellent sweet husband. We had no servants, which want was a great trial to Volumnia, who scarce knew how to put on a shoe unaided; yet did she strive mightily, and suffer silently; but could ne'er master the household arts. She boiled the firmest vegetables into a pulp, sewed potatoes half-raw, spilled the soup and burned the bread; nor could she clean the cave half so well as the most crippled humpbacked hag she had in jealousy dismissed. She being at this time some four months

wi' child, grew readily weary or despondent, seeming at times scarce able to clear away the daily dust or chase off the spiders, ants, snakes, mice, and other little creatures o' the forest that came creeping into the cave. Thou know'st well, old Morpheus is no enemy to dirt, and recks not what he eats, so it sicken him not; yet did it irk me to see Volumnia going to and fro with a heavy unlovely motion, poking irritably at this and that, breaking off" with a sigh and a helpless look, forgetting the soup the while and scorching the pot. 'Sdeath, lad, she could not sew a button on a sleeve, or boil water in a pot, or do any thing, save wi' such struggle as she were giving birth to twins. So at the last did Morpheus don an apron to cook and clean house.

"Why, lad, 'twould ha' warmed thy heart to see me wi' my feather duster, stirring up little clouds o' dust to cheer my wife; or with a long spoon stirring the savory soup i' the big kettle o'er the fire, whilst Volumnia sat a-reading i' the armchair, looking up o'er her Diodorus Siculus with a sad smile. Nay, more, I made me a needle out of a thorn, and sewed up her stockings wi' thread pulled fro' mine own garments; hunted squirrel i' the wood, roasting 'em o'er a fire and turning the pelts into hats and fur collars for Volumnia; went a-fishing i' the streams thereabout; served soup a la Morph, wherein I flung potatoes, squirrel gizzards, fishheads, mushrumps, and what a devil else I could lay my hands on; made me a besom o' twigs bound up wi' twists o' grass rope, wherewith to sweep out the cave. So all the day did I go a-crusoeing, the while Volumnia did study, sigh, and swell.

"Meanwhile o' nights, all was not well 'twixt the conjugal sheets. Now 'tis true, Volumnia no longer lay all ice, waiting to be warmed and moistened by love-speeches i' the high style; but did lift her gown readily, as though uncaring. Nay, oft came she ungowned to bed, and lay obediently on her back. Yet i' the ready lifting and the ungowned going was there a manner o' dutifulness did nigh drive me to desperation. She no longer curled her lip like a wanton, nor looked upon me wi' demon glowing eyes, but did perform her nightly duty in docile obedience; lying not inert and unfeeling, yet wanting the wildness of old; and after, quietly stroking my cheek, and parting my hand. 'Sdeath, 'twas not that I wished for; but 'twas as if she'd grown resolute to change her manner towards me. I knew not, whether she had lost her high opinion of herself, or whether she meant to reward me for excusing her infidelity; nay, sometimes I did suspect, 'twas only she desired no love-speeches from me, forwhy they put her in mind of Scurlock. Aye, though she turned not from me, yet I sore missed my cold-hot Volumnia. 'Sblood, I'll not conceal it, lad: I was jealous o' the dwarf. Old Morpheus jealous of a dwarfeus! Why, 'twas as if I could scarce rouse her to more than a sort of uncaring pleasure; and I did gin to think my tool gross and ugly, wanting the allure and prettiness of

his little prodding poker.

"Yet oft a tiredness, as 'twere a resignation, came o'er me; and I recked not, what came to pass, so as I was not blamed by my cold wife, and could go my own way, in weary peace.

"Twas at this tranquil time an event occurred, the which did seem but loose-linked to my marriage, yet which i' the end did prove its ruin. For look thee, lad, the old shepherd died. His stormy health growing tranquil for a time, like unto my sweet marriage, and seeming to outwit Death with a show of freshness, yet did conceal the germs of dissolution within; and Death standing quietly aside the while, did but gaze fondly on him from across the way, ere stepping up to tap him on the shoulder. I cared not a curse for the old lover of sheep, who ne'er thought me fit husband for his adoptive daughter, judging a god too low for so high a lass; yet did I assume a sober and melancholy mien, the while Volumnia let fall a flood of tears. The death o' the old muttonherd left Olympia all alone; for she had ne'er married, nor let herself be wooed, but had passed her maidenhood in attendance upon sister and father. Though she was a lass well able to till a garden and tend sheep, yet was Volumnia troubled she should live alone i' the wood; aye, and in her grief felt drawn to her sister, of whom she spake oft, and tenderly; wi' this end, that Volumnia did bring Olympia t' the cave, there to live and be cared for; which words did signify, Olympia would resume her old habit of service.

"It misliked me not, to have Olympia i' the cave, for truth to tell I'd had my fill o' sweeping out spiders, and playing Hercules to Volumnia's Omphale. And truth to tell, 'twas a little hard for me to be always alone wi' close-clinging Volumnia; whom though I did sorely love, yet did she have naught i' the way of true conversation. Yet was I careful to keep aloof from the grieving Olympia, and ne'er to be alone with her, for what cause soe'er, lest I bring discord into my peaceable marriage. I was polite to the wench, and cool, and well content to leave her and her mistress together as oft as I might, for to go out and roam the woods alone, and fish i' the streams that lay round about, and stay far from women. 'Tis true, I did now and again bring to mind Olympia i' the pool, yet only when I was abed wi' Volumnia, and then in a wistful way, without keen longing; for I was weary and sore in spirit, and longed only to keep to myself alone, thinking my solitary thoughts, and coming home unblamed to an uncomplaining wife.

"Now a day came, when returning from my solitary ramble through the greenwood, I found Volumnia alone; who looking up from a book did say, how that her sister being out i' the garden, she would speak to me of a matter of grave concern to her; and lowering her eyes, did ask, whether her sister had displeased me in some fashion. Nay, sweet, quoth I, she hath nor pleased me nor displeased

me neither; but I do scarce take note of her, like unto the air I breathe. Then did she say, it troubled her sore, to see me so cold to her sister, who had late lost a father; and she could wish me more attentive and kind. I did reply, I meant not to be unkind, but polite only. What, quoth she, is't polite to utter no word to her, and seem always to shun her company? Nay, sweet, quoth I, but do thou tell me, how thou wouldst have me comport myself towards her, and I shall do thy bidding gladly, as in all things. Why, husband, I would have thee not treat her as so far beneath thee, as not to merit thy notice; and I could wish, thou wouldst walk out with us, and help cheer my sister, who is thy sister too, and doth sorely feel her loss.

“Sdeath, I was vexed; for I had grown enamored of solitude, and desired no commerce wi' the grieving Olympia. Yet was there a truth i' Volumnia's accusal did trouble my mind; nor did I wish to be cruel t' the lass, nor be charged with coldness by my cold wife.

“Mindful of Volumnia's request, I did begin to take some small notice of Olympia, making polite enquiry anent her health, praising the carrots and radishes i' the garden, and addressing to her sage saws, soothing sententiae, and affecting apothegms respecting such matters as the moderation of grief by the passage of time and the amplification of wisdom by the agency of pain. The lass seeming grateful for my fatherly attentions, I did by degrees pass to remarks of a more easy and jesting nature; till thawing into amicableness, and melting into mirth, I did flow into the ready way o' familiarity, as is my nature. She, who had been sullen and morose, did seem to revive in spirit, smiling at the merest trifle o' Morphean banter, and herself talking more free. Olympia though illiterate had great store of practical knowledge, a retentive mind, and a touch of quiet humor withal; and what had begun for me as stiff-backed duty, soon unbuttoned into slippered pleasure. Oft did the three of us go for a stroll i' the wood, lightly talking of this and that; and more and more did Olympia come to seem part of our cavehold.

“Volumnia one day finding me alone, did ask, how Olympia seemed to me; and I did answer, she seemed much improved. So think I, quoth Volumnia, and 'tis in large measure thy due; yet I did mean to enquire, what opinion thou conceivest of Olympia, and whether or no she be a creature beneath thy notice. Nay, sweet, quoth I, 'tis true I was once someddeal o'erpolite to thy sister; yet 'twas not she was e'er 'neath my notice, but that my mind was occupied wi' matters of much weight. But now I do find her, in all ways, fit sister to thee, though wanting thy learning and thy looks. What, saith she, are looks what make a woman? And dost consider her low and ignorant, forwhy she cannot read? Nay, sweet, be not so warm in her defense, for I meant not, she was low; but only that she is not thine equal, in some things.

Permit me to hope, quoth Volumnia, that in time thou wilt discard these false notions, and wilt see my sister as she is; for as the rose is to the weed, the nightingale to the crow, the pearl to the pebble, and swansdown to straw: so is Olympia to me in virtue. And I do hope, that thou shalt come to know her well, and learn to esteem her as I do.

" 'Sdeath, lad, I knew not what to answer; for in plain truth, the shining Volumnia was grown a little dimmed in virtue, since that time she did plant dwarf oak in her cherry orchard. I wished not, that she should turn upon herself, and prey upon herself, in bitterness of self-loathing; yet was I not displeased, to hear her place Olympia above her in virtue, remembering how she laded it o'er the lass, what time I went a-wooing.

" 'Twas not long after, when the three of us taking a turn i' the greenwood, Volumnia did grow sudden tired; and raising a frostwhite hand to her moonwhite brow did soft excuse herself, saying how she wished to return t' the cave, there to rest, yet desiring us earnestly to pursue our way without her. Olympia and I protesting, Volumnia did prove resolute, urging us on our way with a little brisk brushing motion o' the hand, like as she were casting seed before her; and turning sudden away, did leave us there on the path alone. I was in some perplexity, to know what I should do; yet wishing not to vex Volumnia, I did continue along the path with Olympia awhile, urging her to watch carefully o'er her sister, whose health was grown uncertain of late. At last returning t' the cave, there found we Volumnia seated in a chair, holding a chaste book in her dwarf-delighting lap; and looking up as we entered, What, said she, back so soon?—declaring, her tiredness had quite passed away.

"I soon 'gan to take note, how occasion did more and more conspire, to cast Olympia and me together; for Volumnia growing ready weary, did retire from our strolls, or staying i' the cave, did urge us out. 'Twas no hardship for me to be with Olympia, for that I spake easy wi' the lass, and misliked her not; yet was there a something, I knew not what, troubled me sore; and i' the depths o' my mind, suspicion 'gan to grow. For once horned is twice warned, so saith Morpheus; and I was a jealous husband.

"Now a day came, when Olympia and I being thrust out into the greenwood, I did say to Olympia after a time, that I must needs return t' the cave, to fetch a piece of cheese, and that she should wait for me 'i the little clearing where we stood. I did make my way swiftly back, soft-stepping as I neared the cave; my heart hard-pounding the while, and Scurlock's face dark-burning in my brain. So creeping up all stealthily by the side way, I did pause at the entrance; and all slyly I did peep within.

"There saw I Volumnia all alone, standing before a table. She

stirred not, but stood as one lost in thought; and the fingers of one hand played idly upon the rim of a small bronze bowl. On a sudden she turned, and strode to her chair, where sitting her down she took up a book; but starting up, she did cast it away, and strode again to the table. There she turned her head sudden-swift towards the entrance o' the cave; yet not as she had spied me; for she did look quickly down, and turn, and gin to pace. Back and forth 'twixt table and chair she paced her restless way, kneading one fist wi' th'other hand. On a sudden she stopped, and looked out again; and seeming to grow taut wi' resolution, picked up a pair o' white walking gloves and marched towards the cavemouth.

"I drew back all a-tremble behind a leafy bush, but Volumnia seeming to take no notice of any thing did stride forth onto the path, looking nor left nor right, yet bent forward at the waist, as she would arrive faster than herself. 'Sdeath, I near choked to see her stride so. All Indian I fro' tree to tree did craftily creep after. Scarce was I able to hold down my leaping wrath, yet felt anxious lest I should fail to catch her i' the act; yet not so anxious, as not to fear seeing, what for proof's sake I most did crave to see. Volumnia 'gan to look eagerly about, like as she were near th' appointed place; yet seemed she uncertain, and changing her path, did look round again, and listen. So did she seek along the woodland paths.

"Comes she anon to a halt, and seems to listen; and leaving the path, doth step among the trees. At a thicket o' high bushes she doth part some branches, and peer within.

" 'Sdeath, I knew not what to think; but stood spying on Volumnia spying; till on a sudden she doth push her way through, out of my seeing; and I stepping softly after, did peer through into a little clearing, in time to hear her say, all heartily:

—How now, sister. Nay, start not, good sister. I but came out for a stroll, and happening along this path, did chance to hear a noise, which methought must be a deer; and lo, 'twas thee. 'Tis a sweet, secluded spot. Come, why so silent? Dost have a secret? Methinks 'tis a sweet place for secrets, miss. Thou dost seem affrighted, sister. Come, where is he? Did he forsake thee, and leave thee all thy lone? Is he there? Is he there?

—Nay, sister, he did return t' the cave, to fetch a piece of cheese.

—What? Cheese to catch a mouse withal? Why then, sister, I'll await him here, and speak wi' thee. Tell me, sister, hath not my husband a harsh voice?

—Nay, sister, say not so.

—What? Dost find him sweet-voiced?

—Nay, sister, ask me not, I pray; for I would not speak of thy husband familiarly.

—Aye, it may be so; for thou art virtuous. And yet, thou dost walk with him familiarly, and talk with him familiarly; yet wouldst thou not speak of him; 'tis strange. Hast a secret, good sister?

—Nay, no secret; but I would speak of other things.

—Why, an thou'lt not speak of's voice, we'll speak of his nose, or his hands, or his—nay, but thou art virtuous. But tell me, sister: doth he kiss thee on the mouth?

—Nay, say not so, Volumnia, say not so.

—Why, I say not so. I do but ask to know, whether he doth love thee as a brother; for shall not brothers kiss their sisters? Come, is he not thy brother?

—He is thy husband, sister, and doth treat me full courteously.

—It doth please me to know my husband is courteous; for I'd not be married to one who was a stranger to courtesy. Yet would I know, in what way he is courteous. Doth he spread his cloak for thee, sister? Doth he hold thy hand, to help thee across a stream? Come, doth he hold thy hand, sister?

—Nay, sister, cease these questions, I pray thee.

—Why, there's less harm in questions than in touches, sister; yet may touches be sweet, and harm not. Thou dost blush, sister; but thou art virtuous. Come, dost love thy brother? Why then wouldst thou not touch him, in sisterly love? Doth he touch thy neck, sister? Doth he feel thy cheek? Doth thy dear brother paddle about i' thy breasts? Come, doth he pinch thee so? Or so? Or so?

“So in her smiling fury she did pinch the lass, till Olympia cried out in very fear; and I crashing forth did cry, How now, art here? Nay, start not, sweet, I meant not to fright thee; but finding thee not at home, did hasten back in hope thou hadst come in search of me. Why, thou dost seem flushed, Volumnia, and out of breath. Wert here long, my love?

—Nay, husband, I marked not the time; for I did speak with Olympia, and time did fly.

—And so flew I to thee. Then come, sweet sisters, let's walk all three t' the greenwood; and laugh, and be merry. And thanked be heaven, that hath brought this blessed sight to my eyes: for there's naught so sure in all the shifting world as the love of two sisters.

“‘Sdeath, lad, it near froze my blood, that was so recently aboil, to see Volumnia bending o'er her sister like a snake; and it vexed me, lad, it vexed me, to see the old jealousy out-breaking. I foresaw 'twould not be long, ere Olympia went the way o' the hags; and it pained me sore, to think she must depart, and that by Volumnia's own contriving; for truth to tell I'd grown a little fond o' the lass. Yet craving peace in my marriage above all things, I did resign me t' the loss, wi' that melancholy-sweet acquiescence so charming in your true philosopher

and husband.

"O angel innocence! O snowy white Morpheus! For e'en now I did in no wise suspect, what dark design my doting wife was intent upon.

"I the fond hope of holding down suspicion, and delaying departure, I assayed to keep near Volumnia, and away from Olympia; yet would Volumnia not have it so. Why, she e'en charged me wi' coolness to her sister, saying I wavered in affection, and behaved not as became a loving brother; and asked wi' such heat, wherefore I had changed so, as to vex me into sharp-answering how I'd not spend more time with Olympia than wi' mine own wife. Then did she rail at me, the sweet Volumnia, and say 'twas all nonsense I spake, and how I did insult and mortify her, to insinuate she might be suspicious; till I covered my ears, and would hear no more. Nay, worse, she lost no occasion to send me out to Olympia i' the garden, or leave us on the path, returning home alone; yet was she jealous, though she confessed it not.

" 'Twas not long after, when the three of us being out for a stroll, we did come to a pond; and Volumnia raising a chalkwhite hand to her bonewhite brow did say, Come, sister, 'tis hot, let's bathe i' the pool. Wouldst join us, husband? Why, sweet, quoth I, thou'rt in a waggish humor; aye, go bathe thee, and Olympia too; and I will stay here, and guard against intrusion. What, husband, art shy? Thou wert once less so; for look, know'st thou not this pool? 'Sdeath, lad, I much feared me, lest in her impish mood she should say more; yet with a smile doth she lead Olympia t' the pool; and I at my post by the old testing-tree. Quoth I to myself, Aye, Morpheus, old housebound husband, aye, Morpheus, old whorebanned hasbeen—old hussybond—old heirs-boon—old he'sblind horsebrain—here did thy sweet husbandhood commence; for was't not here that thou first o'ercame base desire? And is't not the very spot that led thee, soon after, to that sweet sight did lead to wedlock? Aye, and there's more than one sweet sight, an one have eyes to look; is't not so, old tree? How now, tree, how like to Morpheus thou art: for art not steadfast and true? Yet art thou more fortunate far than I, for thou dost scatter thy seed everywhere, and none do call thee lecherous. Old tree, old bachelor, hearken to Morpheus thy brother. Woo not and wed not, sue not and dread not; for well wed is ill sped, and fair married foul harried. Beware the mar in marriage, and wedlock's lock; shun holy acrimony, nor hang thyself with a well-tied nuptial knot. Aye, though thy life be dull, where's profit in a sharp-tongued wife? But thou, old hermaphrodite, art wise beyond power of tongue t' extol thee, for thou dost dote upon thyself, and fornicate wi' thyself; as happy a marriage as e'er was consummated since the world was dreamed. Would old Morpheus could be wife unto himself!

If Morph wi' Morph could wisely wed,
Then safe were every maidenhead.

Aye, old Morpheus would love himself as he deserveth. Why, I'd ne'er scold myself, nor be jealous o' myself, nor disapprove o' mine own sweet self; but would praise me, and watch o'er me, and comfort me in mine afflictions, all the days o' my life. So would I be true-united at last, like unto thee, old leaf-pate, old bark-beard, who—"Twas at this flood-tide o' rapturous meditation that I heard the cry, Help! Help! Olympia! Husband! Help! 'Sdeath, quoth I, what's this, and thinking no thought save o' my sweet Volumnia, I hied me through the bushes to the shore.

"There not ten feet distant stood Volumnia bosom-deep i' the caressing water, crying out and splashing wild and flailing the pool like a madwoman, the while by turns she clung close to Olympia and drove her sudden off, like as she were possessed. Which seeing, and hesitating but a moment, I did tear off my robe, but not the shield o' virtue beneath, and leaped Leander-like into the wave. Arriving swift by the side o' the wild Volumnia, I assayed to calm her, and take hold of her, but found her so beside herself as to strive mightily against me; but soon o'ermastering her I did 'gin to drag her weak-resisting towards the shore. Now during this time Olympia was so torn 'twixt natural shame, and desire to aid her sister, as she scarce knew what to do; but her nobler nature soon quelling her maidenly fear, she did so far assist me, as to help bring the struggling Volumnia partway to safety. Yet seeing the water grow shallow, and my grip assured, she did fall blushing back: the which Volumnia seeing, she did cry out, and seize Olympia by the leg, upsetting her i' the water and causing a great splash; whereat the maid did blushing break away.

"I heaved Volumnia t' the shore, where growing soon calm, she did say, how a crab had bit her on the foot. What, quoth I, a crab, and in a pool! Thou dost mistake thyself sure, for there be no crabs in such waters as these. Why, then, husband, 'twas a snake, or fish, or some sharp thing; what matter; but it did seize my toe, and bite, and would not let go. Yet, sweet, quoth I, 'tis strange, I see no mark upon thy toe; was't this one? Nay, I know not; my head spins; 'tis all a blur; but I do thank thee, husband, that thou didst come to my aid, and so willingly; what ho, Olympia, how farest thou, sister? The deep-blushing maid scarce answering for shame, did strive to conceal her i' the revealing water, the while I did swift-robe myself and return t' the tree. There I waited all in a tremble; for though I had looked not, yet had I seen, more than immortal eye can well see, uncaring. And I did fear me, lest a wound had been opened in my mind, the which no thought could cure, but worsen only.

"Aye, wounded was I, deeper than I knew; and inwardly bleeding I could scarce sleep o' nights, for thinking on the fair Olympia. All unsuspecting I had come t'admire this and that about the lass, and think her above Volumnia, in some things; and now on a sudden came an uprush of such fire as Virtue itself could not put out. 'Sdeath, lad, I knew not whether 'twas love, or lust, or some new temperature not recorded in these climes; but I did toss t' the sheets, and hang on her eyelash, like any secret-sighing boy. Virtue watched o'er me, whilst Volumnia slept; yet did a small voice whisper, Ho, Morpheus, unseen is unsinning, and hath she not sweet thighs to smooth rough conscience withal? Aye, she was in the full blood and bloom of maidenhood, lush and fresh as a ripe peach to look on; and her blushing innocence did draw me so, as modesty were wantonness itself. Silent as a thief I lurked i' the shadows of my mind, looking out at the sunny places, then drawing sudden back, as one afraid. And still did a small voice whisper, Ho, Morpheus, unknown is undone, and hath she not dark shadows wherein to lie thee down, when thou art sweating hot?

"Now a day came, when Volumnia absenting herself to take a turn i' the wood, I sate in a chair with one o' Volumnia's elevating volumes in my uplifted lap, and a small voice in my ear, the while I watched Olympia moving about the cave with a feather duster and a rag. Intent on her task she bent this way and that, now reaching up to strike down a cobweb, now bending to shine the dusty bronze foot of a polished oak table; and 'neath the folds of her loose worksmock came a fleeting outline of flank and haunch. Her thick mane tight-bound above the neck had come someddeal undone, whereby upon the broad expanse of her maidenly neck a few loose hairs did trail their wanton way. She moved without coquettishness, and free of all wanton purpose, not taking no notice o' me; yet so marked was her attention to her task, as to have about it somewhat o' the too deliberate, like as one who fears she may be spied on, and dares not lift her eyes. Now e'er since the day at the pool she had seemed a little changed towards me; though not unfriendly, yet a little strained in my presence, and desirous of avoiding my gaze. 'Twas forwhy she knew I'd seen uncovered, those parts which modesty fain would keep hid. So did she work, and I watch, the while a small voice whispered, Ho, Morpheus, uncaught is unwrought, and were all things discovered that now lie hid, who would be virtuous?

"Then did I put my book aside—'twas Tertullian's tractate *On the Adornment of Women*—and walking to a small table not far from a high bookcase wherefrom Olympia did remove books one by one, the while she dusted 'em round about with her feathers, I stood deep-pondering, as in contemplation o' Volumnia's library. Yet soon did I turn my

greedy gaze full upon Olympia, who stood but a few steps distant. She seemed not to mark me, but dusted the harder; and in her throat and cheeks a redness 'gan to rise. Yet made she no motion to move away; and mayhap forwhy she worked so hard, her bosom 'gan to heave. Then did a small voice whisper, Ho, Morpheus, to it and do it—eschew it and rue it—when wives be away, old pillicock will play. On a sudden she dropped a book, which falling with a sound like a thunderclap, she uttered a cry, and bent over in haste to pick it up; yet at that same moment did I bend me down, clasping the book and feeling her hot hand half under mine. She making a faint motion to withdraw her hand, did yet half-linger there; and in that instant I knew Olympia was mine. For look thee, lad, though she was virtuous, and chaste, and modest withal, yet was she flesh, and woman; and o'ercome with a kind of sensual torpor, like a stroked cat, and all thought fled, she did but wait to be o'ermastered. And in that instant of sweet knowing, lo, a revelation came to me, the which nigh took my breath away.

“For I did see, more plainer than the down on Olympia’s flushed cheek, what dark design I was nigh to fulfilling. ‘Twas so sudden-clear as to make me to wonder, whether I had dim-suspected it, e’er since o’erhearing the strains o’ the sweet sororal duetto i’ the wood. Aye, wi’ the eye o’ fancy I did seem to see Volumnia dark-smiling, the while I said farewell to virtue. For look thee, lad, the chaste Volumnia desired

I should tumble her sister; and this for two reasons. And the first was this, that having fall’n from virtue, she could not brook the presence of one superior in virtue to herself, to wit, Olympia, whose ruin she all hotly did desire. And the second was this, that once having scorned me, and then having horned me, and knowing she had wronged me, she could not rest ere she had found occasion for my condemnation. And these two reasons being one, did flow so naturally together, as to make her encourage adultery, and abet my dalliance with her dear sister. And seeing she did deep-desire our fall, I resolved me to spare Olympia, aye, and chaste Morpheus too; for not for any thing would I give Volumnia cause to look down upon me, and condemn me. And I did vow, not to come near Olympia, nor touch her never; not though it be with a ten-foot pole, nay, nor wi’ my ten-inch pole neither. All this in a flash: the knowledge she was mine, the revelation o’ Volumnia’s dark scheme, my chaste resolve: and picking up the book, a selection of Tully’s familiar letters, I did present it to the blushing maid, admonishing her to be more careful; whereupon I returned to my chair, and took up Tertullian. Behind me I heard a sound as of some creature stirring, and turning to look, lo, there did I see Volumnia, emerging from out the curtained bed. Why, sweet, said I, wert not out walking i’ the wood? Aye, husband, but soon returning,

and seeing thee intent on thy book, and not wishing to disturb thee, I did step quietly behind thee to the bed, wherein I crept as softly as a mouse; was't not well done? Exceeding well! cried I, and, sweet, I do thank thee, most feelingly, who art so mindful of a husband's quietude; for well thou know'st, how ill I bear intrusion, when I am sunk in meditation.

"Now mark well, lad, forsworn is not forgotten; and though renunciation be but the work of a moment, yet may the acting on't seem an eternity of time. Where'er I looked, there was Olympia; and if I shut mine eyes, lo, there was Olympia. Aye, and Volumnia did so scheme and plot to thrust us twain together, as she did seem Olympia's bawd. Ne'er monk in his desert cell beset by succubi and fired by forty demons of lust was half so sore tested as Brother Morpheus in his cave. 'Sdeath, St. Anthony to St. Morpheus was a desert Don Juan. Chaste wives and damsels, where'er ye may be, take heart, in your testing-time, fro' the trials o' Morpheus. Chastest of husbands, I did fight temptation as Heracles wrestled with Antaeus: for when I threw him, lo, he grew stronger, renewing his strength fro' the earth. 'Sblood, had it not been for Volumnia, I'd ha' yielded, soon or late; for say what thou wilt, a god's but a god; yet as I watched Olympia I remembered me, how that Volumnia did desire our fall. Aye, pride, pride was my secret-weapon 'gainst temptation; for sooner than yield to that scheming whore my virtue-dripping wife, I'd ha' torn out my root wi' mine own hands. So harked I not t' the crowing o' the cock, but pridefully out-peacocked him.

"Volumnia sensing my resolution, did struggle to o'ercome me, devising lecherous stratagems which in the keeper of a bawdyhouse would ha' been commendable. So on a night soon after my chaste vow, whenas I lay lost in lascivious sweet dreaming, I was rude waked by Volumnia, who holding a candle and bending o'er me fro' without the bed, said how she feared for Olympia, who did toss and moan, as one in a fever, yet could not be waked. I stumbling fro' the sheets did sleepily follow Volumnia into Olympiad chamber, where I beheld the lass still as stone, lying belly-down atop the coverlet. She wore a loose gown, which having worked its way up did expose to view all her thigh and the bottom of her ripe rump. Quoth I to Volumnia in a cold whisper, methinks 'tis not fever she should fear, but a chill; and so saying, returned all afire to my chaste sheets.

" 'Sdeath, I'll not rehearse all the sweet schemes, whereby she hoped to chase me from chastity; save one only, that tried me t' the breaking point. Now on a night I was waked by Volumnia crying out in fear; and upon my enquiring, what thing had disturbed her slumbers, Oh, husband, quoth she, I have dreamed such a dream, as I shudder to think on; for methought I was bound by ropes, and lying

on my back, and a great snake crawling o'er me. Sweet, quoth I, fear not, for I will interpret thy dream to thee. The ropes that bound thee, are laws of true religion, the which do prevent thee from straying; and the snake doth signify the divine mercy, which seeketh him who is bound by law; and so, sweet wife, good night. Scarce was I asleep when lo, Volumnia out-crieth, and waking me doth say: Oh, husband, I have dreamed such a dream, as doth make my blood run cold; for methought I was walking in a deep wood, and dark, and a great beast appeared before me, like unto a bristly boar, with a great sharp tusk; and pursuing me, he did pierce my belly with his horn. Nay, sweet, quoth I, fear not, for this is the meaning of thy dream. The wood is Error, wherein thou didst roam. The great boar is God the Father, whose sharp tusk is His only begotten Son; and thy fair belly is thy amorous soul, sweet-ravished by thy Saviour. And now, my sweet, good night, and pleasant dreams. Scarce had I turned over, when lo, a third time Volumnia waked, crying, Oh, husband, I have dreamed such a dream, as maketh the sweat to run down; for methought I stood alone in a dark room; and a naked man did enter, and ravished me. Sweet, quoth I, fear not, for thou hast dreamed a holy dream. For this man that ravished thee, is the one true church; his tool doth signify the Holy Bible, which doth penetrate the mind of her who openeth to receive it; and his seed, that entered thee, words of fructifying truth. Now sweet, be comforted, and think on thy Saviour, who died for thee. Nay, husband, I fear sleep so, that I cannot close mine eyes. Olympia! Ho! Olympia! So with much crying she rouseth Olympia, who hurrying in affrighted, looks in through the half-parted curtains. Then Volumnia recounting her dreams, and her night-fears, doth plead with Olympia, to lie down by her side, and comfort her; and grasping her wrist, and bursting into tears, doth prevail upon th'affrighted maid to enter the marriage bed.

"So lay we there, we three, like little children, all in one bed; Volumnia 'twixt Olympia and me. Now after a time Volumnia did whisper, Olympia, Olympia, art asleep? and no answer but deep breathing. And turning to me she did whisper, Husband, art asleep? and no answer but deep breathing. Then all softly sits she up, and creeping o'er Olympia doth leave the bed. So lay we there, we two: the wench asleep, and I sleep-feigning. And in that feigning, lo, I felt my resolution 'gin to rot. Then did a small voice whisper, Ho, Morpheus, unspied is untried, and hath she not a sweet dark cave wherein high pride can bow his head awhile? And: Ho, Morpheus, what a good little husband thou art, wi' thy handsome pair o' horns. Now as I lay thus listening, Olympia did stir in her sleep; and overturning drowsily, she came to rest with her leg against me, and an arm loose-cast o'er my chaste bosom. And like as Aurora, shaking sleep from her eyes, doth

rise from out her saffron bed, and leaving her Eastern palace doth mount on high: and like as the lark, when first it sees day break, doth fro' the dull earth mount to heaven's gate: so from his flow'ry bed old pillicock did swift arise. Then did I strive mightily, me to o'ermaster. I did bethink me, how that the holy St. Francis, what time he was sore beset by the demon of fornication, did make him a chilly wife of snow; yet could I take small comfort therein, forwhy I had already a wife of snow. Then did I bethink me of dear St. Agnes, who all naked was led into the lupanar, and she not yet thirteen; yet did no angel o' the Lord fill my room with light, transforming it into a place of prayer. For look thee, lad, I was no mortal sinner, watched o'er and protected by angels and such; nay, I was naught but a poor ruttish god, alone in a bed with a ripe-rumped wench and cold-arsed Virtue. Time after time I did turn to mount her; but seeing i' the eye o' fancy Volumnia's look of triumph I mastered me, lad; I mastered me. So doth old Morpheus say unto thee, pride is suffer than cockstand. Then did a small voice whisper, Ho, Morpheus, press against her, man, and ease thee without violation; yet fearing 'twould serve Volumnia's purpose, I did listen unheeding. And I did vow, sooner to cut off my cods and hang 'em round my neck for lasses to laugh at than serve one jot o' Volumnia's fell purpose. And in my pride I left not the sheets, to lay me down on the floor o' the cave; but I did lie there wi' the wench against me, and mastered me, though the fire rose in me and the sweat poured down my sides. For Jacob wrestled but with an angel of heaven, but Morpheus lay wrestling with a vengeful wife. So I lay there through the night. And the curtain opening, lo, 'twas morning, and Volumnia standing cold-eyed and white-faced before me did say: Good morrow, husband, hast slept well? Yet could I answer nothing, but lay weak, as in a swoon.

"So passed the night o' my greatest struggle and triumph, lad; whereafter I well knew, I was victor i' the war. Nay, so certain was I, that I did 'gin to flaunt my self-mastery, seeking not t'evade Olympia, but permitting Volumnia to lead me into temptation, that I might show my o'ercoming. Why, 'twas as if I scarce thought at all upon Olympia, but upon cold-eyed Volumnia only. Came a night when that she-devil did lead me into the slumbering Olympia's chamber, where under pretext of her sister's illness, she did lay my hand upon Olympia's warm and naked thigh, the while she held the candle nigh, t'observe me searchingly; whereat I did smile my most husbandly smile; and under me the girl half-naked stirred in her sleep. Nay, more: not content wi' being led into temptation's way, I did seek out occasion to come close t' the blushing maid, and show myself untroubled and cold. Volumnia seeing herself defeated, did grow sharp to the lass, and spitefully 'gan to taunt her, saying, Why, sister, methinks thou hast

such virtue, as to be scarce woman; for though thou be ripe for a husband, yet dost thou look upon no man. Yet hath she a shapely leg, hath she not, husband, and ripe breasts; yet mayhap is she but a snow-woman, who loveth no man. So we two hovered round her, like two fiends.

"Olympia being not insensible o' the darkness howling round her, and feeling herself close pressed, did strive t' evade us, finishing her tasks as swiftly as she might, and going out into the woods alone. Yet Volumnia and I soon growing restless, and hating to be alone, would in time go in search of her; and tracking her to some quiet stream, there did we stand o'er her where she sat, and baited each other above her bowed head. 'Sdeath, 'twas madness, lad; and times were, I seemed to wake as from an evil dream, and see the sorrowing Olympia, her o' the haunted eyes, pursued by two demons. Yet stung by pride, and long-pent-up rage, I who but a short time since had overcome lust himself, could not o'ercome my lust for battle. There was in Volumnia a something, I know not what, drave me to oppose her with my heart's deepest darkness of heav'n-defying rage. The innocent Olympia being no match for such a precious pair, was near driven out of her wits; and a strangeness came o'er her, the which I marked well, but heeded not.

"For she would start, and look about guiltily, at the slightest noise; and now and again a wild look would come into her eyes, like as she were one who had seen a spirit i' the night. She who was so staid and placid in motion, the very opposite of taut and tight-strung Volumnia, would on a sudden drop a cup, and look about, like one distracted. More and more did she strive to elude us, seeking solitude i' the wood; and e'en in our presence she did seem elsewhere, looking not eye to eye, as she would keep herself hid. Once, thinking herself unwatched, she raised the back of a hand to her brow, and stood with her head slight-bowed; and my heart moved for the girl, so sore beset by me. Yet but a moment later Volumnia appearing, How now, husband, quoth she, see how my sister stands and prays; for though she's a woman, yet is she virtuous. Then did Olympia seem to vanish from my sight, consumed in the black hellfires that burned in my brain. For I was like a beast o' the field, who all peacefully grazing i' the green grass, doth on a sudden ramp about, and rage, forwhy he is stung by wasps; which wasps were the words and looks of Volumnia.

"Now a night came, when waking from restless sleep, I heard a sound, as of footsteps falling; and peeping through the curtain, I saw Olympia slow-creeping fro' the cave. I turned t' the slumbering Volumnia, to rouse her from sleep; yet did some instinct stay my hand. Mayhap I felt pity for poor Olympia, whom e'en in sleep the grim-visaged Volumnia did seem t' accuse and taunt. Quiet as a fat mouse I

stepped fro' the connubial bed and crept after. Outside the cave Olympia was not in sight, yet knowing her accustomed path I struck out into the dark wood. 'Sdeath, lad, I was all in a sweat, for that I feared me she had flown forever; and I saw how that Volumnia and I had driven her away, and how that life wi' the virtuous Volumnia would be a worse hell than hell itself. So wi' such imaginings I continued on my way, close-listening for the sound o' crackling twigs; and after a time I came to a thick stand, beyond which I knew was a small clearing. There I seemed to hear a faint sound, as of gentle weeping. All softly did I creep fro' the path; and parting the branches I did see Olympia, standing at the edge o' the clearing, and looking anxiously about. 'Sdeath, I knew not what to think. I was of half a mind, to go out t' the grieving lass, and confess all, and run off with her to a green isle, in a blue sea, and there live happily forever, far from virtue; and as I did summon up this vision, lo, there comes me a crackle through the wood beyond the clearing, and out steps Scurlock.

"Aye, 'twas the devil himself; who standing there wi's hands on's hips, she doth run to him and fall to her knees before him, covering him o'er wi' kisses and weeping sore. Then doth he comfort the lass, wiping the tears from her cheeks, and uttering soft love-words, the while his little hand made free wi' that desolated bosom. I watched as one in a trance, without pow'r to move; for 'twas as if I were gazing on mine own nightmare. Aye, they were familiar, I saw in a trice; and dim-wondered, how oft they had met i' the wood. 'Sdeath, lad, I saw it all: how th'unhappy maid had one day been weeping i' the wood, and Scurlock coming upon her, had comforted the lass, soothing her grieving heart with honey-dripping words. And her sensual nature stirred up i' the cave, did on a day yield to his soft suasions. All this I knew as sure as 'twere I myself had done the deed; and before me now, I saw the chaste Olympia lie back upon the ground, like as she were long wont to do't; and Scurlock sudden atop her. Then did I feel a chill in my marrow, and a heaviness in the heart of me; and I did lower mine eyes, as 'twere in shame or sorrow. 'Twas soon over; and after he doth lay him down on an elbow, and light up a pipe, the while Olympia doth stroke his chestnut hair.

"Then, then, did the rage come o'er me, lad. Aye, 'twas the smug and saucy look of him, did rouse me fro' my trance, firing my blood wi' jealous ire; and stepping through the bushes I cried: Scurlock!

"Olympia giving a cry, that devil Scurlock springs to his feet, and throws me such a look as leaped like fire into my soul. Aye, there was hatred in it, but 'tis not hatred whereof I speak. For 'twas a pained and puzzled look, as who should say: Ah, Morpheus, why dost persecute me thus, 'tis old Scurlock, thy brother. Though but the matter of a moment, yet did it suffice to stay my murd'rous purpose. So I did

stand, like one bemused. Then did he look at me all knowingly, and bowing low with a mocking sweep of's arm, he doth offer me Olympia. She sobbing, yet seeing the gesture, and half-understanding, doth reach out to him, and cling to's leg; which seeing, I was all aflame again to kill him; but wrenching free he leaps away, and wi's face twisted in hate he doth cry at me: Devil!—and turning flees through the wood. Olympia crying after him, doth reach out her hand like one about to drown, and vainly trying to struggle to her feet, doth faint away. Wi' Scurlock's cry clanging in my brain, I sprang to her side. And though my mind was heavy, and my heart sore, still a small voice whispered, Ho, Morpheus, 'tis but a wench on the grass, go to it, man. Then like a madman I leaped to my feet, and picking up a stone did with a cry hurl it after Scurlock into the trees. O'ermastering me thus, I returned to the lass, and like a fat angel watched o'er her where she lay. Aye, 'twas then the gods o' mockery should ha' sent Volumnia crashing through the trees, pointing her vengeful finger; aye, then I'd ha' howled black laughter at the moon, till tears of fire ran down my cheeks. Yet all was silent, save for a drumming in my brain. Feeling all beaten about the head, at length I did pick up the unreviving maid, and carry her back (the cave, taking no care to go unseen—aye, in my black mood, yearning to be false accused—yet did I go undetected. So did I carry her past the connubial bed to her chamber, where laying her down, and watching o'er her till she 'gan to revive, I returned t' the marriage sheets, and crept in beside Volumnia, who in slumber resembled an eyeless Erinye.

“On the morrow Olympia being feverish, kept to her bed; Volumnia hov'ring round her the while, and I weary and snappish. All that day did my mind turn round one only thought: how 'twas I who had driven the lass to Scurlock, by leagu'ing me wi' venomous virtue. And seeing it was pride did league me thus, and make of me another Volumnia, I did resolve to put an end to enmity and gainstriving in my miserable marriage, and by confession start anew. For I did see how that Volumnia hating my knowledge of her fall, had striven to gain moral mastery o'er me. So by concealing my own fall wi' Rosabella, I had aided her vengeful purpose. Now on that very night, Olympia having fall'n asleep, and Volumnia in a high state o' suspiciousness, I did request to speak with her; and pacing about, as she sat stonily in her chair, I did rehearse the course of our marriage, and how we were fall'n on evil days. And I did say, how there was a struggle for mastery in virtue, betwixt us twain; and how I was weary at heart, and sick unto death, of the vain travail. And I did thereupon confess, how whilst she was dallying wi' Scurlock 'i the connubial bed, I was dillying wi' Rosabella under every bush i' the forest, which sport I had hid from her out of pride. And I did say, how I did forgive her

for divagating fro' the strict path o' virtue, and horning me with a dwarf, forwhy I had grown a little apart from her; and how I would in turn be forgiven, for dilating into adultery. And I did say, how we should begin anew, and put an end to striving, and taunting, and all such vanities. Now had I o'erheard such a speech as that, from such an one as I, I'd ha' cracked my ribs laughing; yet such was my state, as the words did pour out in true hot earnest. For I was weary o' the struggle, and recked not a straw, whether or no my long husbandhood had corrupted my sense of style.

"Now when I had done, I did wait for Volumnia to answer; yet said she not a word. Not a word, lad; not a word; but sat cold as stone, and her eyes like black glass. So after a time she did rise, and go to bed.

"Yet was I so accustomed to her stony ways, as I protested not; but counseling self-patience, did resolve to wait. On the morrow she stayed cold and silent, yet did I note, how she seemed a little thawed towards Olympia, which gladdened me for the girl; and Olympia showing unease at my presence, did in turn seem grateful to Volumnia, and comforted by her. I did take long walks in the wood, and waited for Volumnia to speak. Yet did she remain frozen in silence, save towards Olympia; and so the days passed.

"Now on a day I said to Volumnia, how that I was impatient to hear a word from her, anent my late confession; and informing her I would be out i' the wood all the day, did say I would speak with her that night. She answered not, but raising a tombwhite hand to her shroudwhite brow, did turn away. So I did take my leave, and walked out into the greenwood. There did I wander along shady paths, and sat me down by streams, and thought on marriage, and virtue, and Volumnia, and Olympia, and Rosabella, and Scurlock, and Morpheus, and all. So after a time I hied me sighing home. And when I drew nigh the cave, my heart misgave me, I knew not why. And when I entered in, lo, my heart grew faint, and mine eyes dim; for all was empty, save for some straw on the dirt o' the floor, and a few things o' mine own in a little pile. And like as one half-waking from a dream, who knows not whether what he sees before him be dream or day: so did I stand and stare. And at the last crying out, Volumnia! Olympia! I did rage throughout the chambers o' the cave; but all was empty, and vanished as a dream.

Then leaving the cave, and seeing the wagon gone, I did go out into the woods, crying Volumnia! Olympia! till my voice failed, and my legs gave way under me; and resting awhile, I made my way t' the old shepherd's hut, and found it deserted and dark. And like a madman I did roam the wood, crying Volumnia! Olympia!—falling t' the ground in weariness, and sleeping under trees, and feeding on

roots and berries.

“And like unto Nebuchadnezzar the king, who when his kingdom was departed, was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles’ feathers, and his nails like birds’ claws: so did Morpheus wander wild i’ the forest, and would not be comforted.

“Now on a day, coming to a rude hut, and sick in body as in soul, I was ta’en in by an old woman, who laid me down and fed me broths and herbs, till regaining my strength I told my woeful tale. Then did she say, how not long since she had delivered a boy-child of such a woman as I had spoke of, another woman being with her in attendance; and how they lived in a hut, on the far side of a stream. Then did I beg the old woman to lead me unto them, the which she said she would do, but on one sole condition, that I would lie with her. And though it liked me not, to lie wi’ such a wrinkled crone, yet did I set to work; and lo, though she was foul and old of face, yet of body was she fair and young. Now when I did enquire, how this came to pass, she said she was under an enchantment, which could be broke only if she bore a child. And thanking me for that I lay with her though she was foul and old of feature, she did lead me to the stream, but would not cross over. Then wishing her well I crossed the stream, and coming to the hut I knocked at the door, and receiving no answer did knock again. But hearing a faint noise within, and still no answer, I did knock again, and at the last did beat at the door till the bolt breaking it gave way. And there within, lo, I beheld my home: for ‘twas the same rug, and chairs, and the marriage bed wi’ closed curtains. Then striding t’ the bed I parted the curtains, and within sat Volumnia, hugging a babe to her bosom, as I were a snake come to bite; and beside her Olympia, with eyes downcast. Then did I cry, Why didst thou leave me thus—but Volumnia clutching her damnable brat, which began to cry, sat cold as clay, and would not answer, the while Olympia did look all about wi’ frightened eyes. Then did I roar, and plead, and beg, and rage, but ‘twas like talking to marble. And I did swear, an she’d not answer me, I’d ne’er look on her again, nay, though she lay dying and called for me with her last breath; but Volumnia sat stony cold, clutching her babe.

“And seeing she would not answer, I cursed the day I e’er met wi’ virtue; for not the foulest devil in hell had such a stony heart as she. Then did I turn and go, and leave the accursed wood, and return to Pru; yet was my heart sore within me. And after many a sleepless night, behold, I returned t’ the wood, and found the stream, but the hut was desolate and dark. And again raging through the wood, like one out of’s wits, at last by chance I came to a small cabin, and within I found Volumnia; yet though I begged for reconciliation, would she

say no word, but stared at me from out her fiery cold eyes. Then did I leave forever.

"But in the wood not far from thence I had a great bed builded, like unto mine own, and gave out, how 'twas for my wife and child and Olympia. And in time I did learn, that they had gone to live there. And since that time I've not laid eyes upon her; but spies have told me, how that she reared my son in womanly luxury, and poisoned his mind against me. And always doth she spread tales against me, and set spies to watch o'er me, and report my deeds; and all to one end, that she might show how she is above me in virtue, and how it was right and just, that she did forsake me.

"Now in my heart I did forgive that devil Scurlock; for though he horned me, yet did he know me for his brother. And in my heart I did forgive Olympia, that she did fall from virtue wi' such an one as he; for 'twas I and virtue did drive her t' the deed. And in my heart I did forgive the chaste Volumnia, that she did play at ding-dong with a dwarf; for though a woman be upright, yet at the last will she lie down on her back, and wooing, wed, or wild, what matter. But in my heart of hearts, in the black dust of my soul, in the marrow of my bones and in the red smoke of my blood, I swear by the unquenchable fires of hell and by the immortal balls of Morpheus that I forgive not that virtue-glittering icicle, that she did close against me, aye, close against me, and forgive me not, forwhy I knew she had fall'n from virtue; and in her virtue-venomed and hate-harboring heart she did seek revenge, finding it at the last in my confession. And I do curse the day, and the hour, I e'er met wi' virtue; for 'tis the most foulshaped fiend I e'er saw in all the days o' my reckless immortality. And to all husbands, thus saith Morpheus: smile not, fool, thou hast married a whore. And to all bachelors, where'er ye may be, thus saith Morpheus: better an eternity of torment in the fires of blackest hell than a month of honeyed marriage. But if the weakness come o'er ye, lads, marry ye not a virtuous she, but choose any poxed whore instead; for sooner marry the devil himself than Virtue in the shape of woman."

V. Mirror Tales



1. *The Glittering Chambers*

MORPHEUS led me along a winding and flickering passageway much like the others I had seen, except that the walls appeared to be somewhat damp. After a while the slickness increased to such a degree that in the torchlight I saw in the wet stone my dim and wavering reflection as I passed. The dark shine was so striking that I reached out to touch the wall on my right, and was surprised to feel a dry smoothness as of polished stone. The walls had become dark mirrors in which I saw myself and Morpheus clearly passing.

"Look at that, Morph, I can even see the smoke from your cigar. It's really quite remarkable."

"Aye, lad, that it is," he said without much interest. I turned back to examine one of the polished walls and was startled to see reflected in it the figure of a man behind me. I whirled around but saw no one in the dark.

"Morpheus!" I cried, tugging his sleeve, "I saw someone, I swear I —"

"'Sdeath, lad, hast no eyes? 'Tis filled with 'em." Now I saw in the wall dim figures deep within the stone, walking this way and that, and clearer figures who appeared closer to my reflection, walking behind and before; and other figures who came toward me or walked away, deeper and deeper into the stone.

"But who are these people, Morph? And why are they trapped in the stone?"

"Why, who but reflections, lad, going quietly about their business as they're wont to do, when lacking th'incumbrance o' shacklement to outer forms."

The world reflected in the stone appeared to extend far back, though beyond a distance of some twenty feet within the stone the images became vague and indistinct, whether owing to the quality of the surface or to some other cause I did not know. The persons appeared to be in a large hall of some kind; I noticed tables and chairs here and there. But around one bend in the passage the hall gave way to an outdoor scene, which appeared to be a clearing in a forest, with dim hills beyond. The people in the stone appeared to be aware of our

passing reflections, for they withdrew carefully as we passed; yet though they shrank from us, they kept curiously aloof, and never looked directly at us, almost as if they were pretending to be unaware of the intrusion. From time to time my reflection came to an object in his path, and passed ghostlike through. He appeared to be in their world but not of it, as if he were a visiting spirit. And as I passed I felt a sharp desire to mingle with these silent people, to pass through the polished walls that divided them from me in the very act of revealing them.

"They appear to be talking, Morpheus, yet I can't hear them; not a peep; no, not a whisper. They're not at all friendly, though I can't say they appear hostile either. It's eerie, whatever else it is. I felt much more at ease with the shadow of Michael Crane."

"Aye, 'tis a queer self-loving race, and had liefer play at jackstraws wi' their own kind than talk of immortality wi' the likes o' thee and me. 'Tis but the nature o' their world, lad; for look thee, an thou dost shout into a mirror in thy world, 'twill give thee back thy aping, but no sound. Yet here's but the broad forecourt o' their hall, the eyebrow as 'twere o' thy naked mistress. Doth not old Morpheus speak true?"

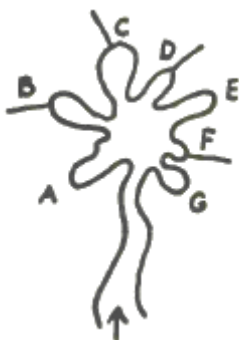
And indeed as he spoke the black-mirrored passageway ended and I found myself in a small chamber that seemed to flash and glitter. It was a chamber of highly unusual shape, for the rough and unpolished walls formed deep folds or pockets; and hanging from the walls of the pockets were numerous mirrors and torches. It was as if I were standing in the center of a highly irregular starfish. Some of the pocket-ends were pierced by archways that led to other flickering chambers, themselves pierced by archways that revealed dim glimpses of further chambers. I was thus in a small room multiplied by many pockets hung with mirrors, and pierced by tunnels opening into further chambers in all directions. The overriding sense was therefore not one of smallness but of expansion. As I looked about, a sigh of vexation escaped me, and Morpheus turned to me with a look of surprise.

"It's just that I didn't think to bring pencil and paper, Morph; if I don't make some record of what I see, I'm afraid I'll forget everything."

"Tush, fear not, lad. Why, see here. 'Tis not so sharp as the tongue of a wife, nor so long as a tale of sorrow; but 'twill serve."

He had fished about in one of the pockets of his voluminous robe and now held up for my inspection the chewed stub of a pencil, perhaps one inch in length. The blunt lead tip barely emerged from the wood. I took it gladly, and was patting about my pockets in search of paper when Morpheus extracted from his other pocket a folded envelope torn across one end. "What say'st thou, lad, art not

fortunate? Beethoven did scribble symphonies on such scraps as this." Ignoring his banter, I at once set about making a rough sketch of the chamber, while Morpheus watched with ill-concealed amusement.



At points B, C, D, and F were arched tunnels leading to other chambers; A, E, and G were cul de sacs. The pockets varied from about ten to twenty or more feet in depth, and from five to eight feet in width. From the center of the chamber I was able to take in much at a glance, though the irregularity of the arrangement of pockets prevented me from seeing everything, and I had to step this way and that to complete my sketch. On the walls of the pockets hung mirrors of all shapes and sizes; between each pair of mirrors flamed a torch.

When I had completed my sketch from shifting positions in the small central portion of the chamber, Morpheus led me into pocket A, which was about twelve feet long, with half a dozen mirrors hanging on each long wall and a single mirror at the end. The mirrors were of various shapes and sizes, all old and tarnished in appearance. I stepped up to the first mirror on my left, a dark oval with a small crack at the top, framed in a black, cracked wood carved with many curlicues. At first I saw nothing in the glass but a murky darkness and the reddish glow from a nearby torch. As I watched, the cloudy surface seemed to clear, and I saw in the glass a face that was not my own. He had a dark beard and strong, stern features, and wore an old-fashioned costume of heavy black, buttoned across his throat. He appeared to be searching for something, for he stared out intensely, slightly shifting his gaze. "Why, who's this, Morpheus? He doesn't look like anyone I know." "Nay, I know not the man; but look, lad, 'tis changing." And indeed the man had faded away, and there now appeared a woman's face, pale and sad and stern; and after a time this too faded away. I turned inquiringly to Morpheus, who said: "Why, know'st thou not a rememb'ring mirror, lad?"

"A remembering mirror! No, I've never heard of one, where I come from. What sort of mirror is it, exactly?"

"Why, 'tis a mirror that doth remember all that it hath seen. For know, that 'mongst the mirrors o' thy realm, there be those such as

thou see'st here, which in all do resemble thy common mirrors, save in this only, that they be mirrors wi' memories, and do retain the potency o' their reflective pow'rs, showing back unto all eternity the forms that long since have vanished fro' th'upper world. Here see'st thou the faces of all them who e'er have looked i' the glass."

"But can you tell — up there — whether a mirror has a memory?"

"Aye, 'tis possible, but by such small signs as are known to but a few. For if, as thou dost approach thy glass, there should seem to be a motion i' the glass, as of a fleeting shadow, or mayhap a telltale kind of stillness, such as a place doth show when it hath been abandoned but a moment since: then hast thou surprised another image, fleeing at thy approach. But look here, lad. 'Tis a merry crew."

He had stepped before a dark mirror on the opposite wall, wherein I could see darkly shadowed forth a great table in a hall. A feast was in progress. Plump redfaced men in periwigs drank from great flagons and licked their grease-shiny red lips while fat merry ladies with highpiled hair and halfbared breasts threw back their heads and laughed with plump shaking cheeks. The company turned toward a man with brilliant black eyes and a thrusting chin, who was speaking with precise lip movements; his face had an expression of malice and keen intelligence. Suddenly the company flung back their heads and roared with silent laughter. A flagon was overturned. Red wine rushed to the floor.

"Methinks 'twas a lively rogue, such as old Morpheus loveth well. See how the fat wench with heaving bosom doth fan herself wi' sweet quick motions of her pretty wrist, lowering her eyes all maidenly and looking sudden-wanton o'er her pandering fan. And there 'neath the table, lad: see how that fat devil i' white breeches and stockings doth press his massy thigh against Lady Bosoms leg. Why, Sir Mirror, thou'rt a naughty lad, peeping saucily at such a scene. But how now, what's this?"

He had stepped before an ornate mirror, which showed a bejeweled lady seated at a table strewn with flashing vials of faceted glass, small jars of ointments and unguents, and the corner of a folded fan. She was visible from the waist up, and naked save for her many jewels. She had very pale, full breasts, about whose rosy and soft-looking nipples a few fine, curly hairs were visible. She was gazing out so intently, so searchingly, that I could not refrain from attempting to meet her gaze; yet though I looked directly into her large brilliant eyes, she did not see me. Softly, as if not to disturb her, I asked: "What's she looking at, Morph? She seems to be looking for someone." " 'Sdeath, lad, hast ne'er seen a woman wi' such a look as that? 'Tis herself she doth gaze upon." She reached up and with an easy motion let down her dark hair, which came tumbling down about her, half-covering

one eye. Slowly she turned her head from side to side, always gazing intently. Now she slit her eyes, now she made them large and wondering; now she covered her breasts with her hair, and pouted and simpered, now she parted the hair to permit the nipples to peep out; now she made soft kissing motions with her lips; and always as she changed her expression she kept her intense, cold, studious gaze.

" 'Sdeath, lad, thou and old Morpheus will melt away in very dew, an we continue gazing thus. Thy Jack doth lift his eager head; poor fool, dost think such a one as that cares aught for thee? 'Tis mirror-love, man, in whose comparison the panting love of Venus for the boar-gashed boy is but a false-polite and formal nod o' the head, and Dido's death-drawn passion but a summer's yawn. Ah, mirror-love, how can mere mortal or immortal vie wi' thee? How now, my milky wench? Dost love thyself, sweet whore? Aye, peep out, little robins. 'Sdeath, that such cold meat should cause such fire. 'Tis a pit for cockfights. Dost smile, baggage? Hah! Succubus!"

He raised a fist and smashed it against the stone wall beside the mirror, while the lady continued to gaze intently out, winding her thick hair about a finger. Breathing heavily, his nostrils flared, Morpheus turned abruptly away.

I now passed from mirror to mirror in pocket A as from picture to picture in a museum, gazing upon silent and dusky faces, briskly striding figures, empty rooms. I then passed with Morpheus along the walls of B and C, glancing through the tunnels at nearby furrowed chambers where mirrors dim-glittered in torchlight. In the mirrors I saw grave glittering courtiers, a weeping woman, a crowned and sad-eyed queen; and here and there among the mirrors of glass were small round mirrors of burnished bronze, wherein dimly I saw cold, stern faces with jetblack curls and passionate eyes. Morpheus led me back through the center of the chamber into G, and we strolled along the walls of the remaining pockets. In one mirror I saw a naked woman lying on her stomach on a bed, holding up in one hand a mirror with an ivory handle in which she gazed at her plump, dimpled buttocks; in another mirror a naked bald man with a thick black mustache stood sideways, thrusting out his chest and tightening the muscles of his arm.

" 'Sdeath," said Morpheus as he led me from a pocket into a connecting tunnel, " 'tis a prinking, preening, posturing crew; a plaguy pack o' coxcombs and whores. Aye, but beware, Sir Fop and Lady Pride, as thou preen'st thyself unseen before thy glass, lest thy mirror have a memory; for then shall all that's seen be shown, unto all eternity."

"Well, Sir Morph, I'll certainly think twice before being alone with a mirror, after this. But did you notice how serious most of those faces

were? And there's another thing I couldn't help noticing."

"Aye, there be many a sweet arse amongst 'em."

"I meant the sadness in their eyes."

"Disdain not the arse, lad, it hath been known to comfort many a man in his time of tribulation. Aye, lad. 'Tis a vain and sad-eyed lot. Twixt self-love and heartache doth thy race consume itself, till dying doth put an end to pride, and tears, and all."

"Yes, mirrors definitely don't show us at our best—oh, I swear, Morpheus, I'm keeping away from mirrors from now on!"

" 'Tis not likely lad. Thine is a mirror-loving race, and doth feed on reflection like cats on cream."

"Hmmm. Well, you've got to remember we're mortal, Morph. Don't be so hard on us. After all, maybe it's fear of disappearing that makes us want to multiply ourselves."

"Hmmm me no hmmms, man, and mortal me no mortals. 'Sdeath, dost think moldering mortals the only pride-poxed kind? 'Sblood, do the gods lack vanity? Think you sweet-rumped Venus doth shun her glass? Think you golden Apollo doth bar himself from his barber, nor study his golden cods i' the flatt'ring glass? Think you the rump-pinching maid-mastering doxy-handling sweet-smiling god of dreams hath ne'er gazed in wond'ring admiration upon his immortal Morphypuss? 'Sfoot, 'tis a pack o' popinjays, wanting plea of mortality. A plague on all peacocks! 'Tis gods, men, and mermaids do love a glass."

The tunnel, a rough-hewn passageway without mirrors or torches, led to another chamber, much like the first but having nine pockets, five of which ended in tunnels. Through the tunnels further chambers were visible, spreading out in all directions. Morpheus led me into a pocket and paused before a wide and dusty mirror. An old woman gazed out, seated before her vanity table. She was naked except for a heavy silver-chain necklace about her yellowish neck. Her wrinkled skinny breasts hung down to her stomach as if they had become unfastened above. She was bald except for a few wisps of white hair about the temples, and before her on the table was a bald wigstand beside which lay a rumpled black wig. Faceted glass vials and stoppered bottles glittered. In a glass of cloudy water lay her bottom teeth. Her lips were waxy red. She was gazing out intently, turning her head slightly back and forth.

"Why, look here, Carl, here's a glass to make an ape turn philosopher. What does she here? Perchance 'tis some superannuated Helen, who doth dream on the fair prince and the burning town. What ho, my Lady Greensleeves, art sad? She seems not sad. 'Sdeath, mayhap she doth faint in admiration of her shrunk paps. Art silent, my sweet, my toothless wench? What think'st thou, lad? 'Tis a fair bag o'

bones to lie thee down withal. Her skin hath no comparison, for 'tis more whiter than the white shroud, more cooler than coldest tombs, more softer far than the footsteps of creeping Time. What ho, my lovely, my bald beauty! Art cold? Here's a warm lad will love thee for thy soul. What though she hath but half her teeth, shall not backbite; what though her pate's an egg, did not Helen spring from an egg? Mark well, lad, how like to her thou art; for youth is fleeting, and so's age. A pox on sixteen! 'Tis a time of great wantonness. Then come kiss me, rank and eighty, eld's a stuff will not endure.

O an old lank shank
And a breath that's rank
Are my delight.
O an ancient flank
And a poll that's blank
Make sweet my night.

Ah, lad, she loves me not. Weep, eyes, and break, heart! 'Tis mirror-love hath blotted me out."

"Why, Morpheus, you're being unkind."

"Unkind is it! Sweet Morpheus unkind! Nay, see how she doth turn her neck this way and that. Why, the wanton smiles."

And indeed she had begun to smile, very slowly, staring intently out. Her smile faded, and turning her head she smiled again.

"Unkind is it! 'Sdeath, not Helen sailing o'er the sea to start a fire to warm her toes had more pride in her carrying off than this shrunk shrew i' the turn of her neck. Peacocks and popinjays! Peacocks and popinjays!

In women no trust;
Love is but lust;
Pleasure's a crust;
Thou too art dust."

We now passed from mirror to mirror and pocket to pocket; and everywhere I saw old women gazing out. "But what sort of chamber is this, Morpheus, where all the women are old?"

"Why, 'tis your chamber of faded beauties, lad; for of rememb'ring mirrors there be several kinds, which do show back variously that they have espied. And some do show back all, yet some do show back but a part; and of these partially rememb'ring mirrors, some show back faded beauties only, some secret crimes, some scenes of great lechery, some ugly ladies, some racked by diseases. Here in this chamber be ladies renowned for beauty, as queens and princesses, milkmaids and common wenches, the mistresses of lecherous kings, all great beauties

in their day, who far outlived their fame. Why, see here, lad, this little bronze mirror, hanging off in a dusty corner. Dost see the rot-toothed hag within?"

Dimly in the old and battered metal I saw a worn and gap-toothed face, wrinkled and slackskinned. "Who is it, Morpheus? Some old queen or other?"

"O cruel epitaph! Aye, lad. 'Tis Menelaus his queen, she that young Paris skipped with o'er the waves. Home she hied to her horned mate, what time Aeneas went creeping through the fire, and there lived happy in Lacedaemon for many a year."

Morpheus led me through the fourth of the five tunnels into another chamber, through whose several tunnels further chambers were visible. Without pausing he led me through one of these tunnels into a further chamber, and so from chamber to chamber until I could not have found my way back; and always through the tunnels more chambers were visible, mirrored and dim-glittering. At one point I stopped to make a rapid sketch, shown below. The shapes, the relative distances, and the number of pockets are meant to be suggestive and make no claim to scientific accuracy.



So from chamber to chamber we passed in that maze of remembering mirrors, and I cannot say how many chambers we had crossed before Morpheus paused in a chamber that resembled all the others, except that its mirrors appeared empty of reflection. Beside Morpheus I stopped before a small, round mirror. In the dusky glass I could not see my face.

"What sort of mirrors are these, Morph? They seem to have lost their memories."

"Aye, sweet wag, so 'twould seem. But methinks this same seem's naught but a mirror-word, which like to an image i' the glass, doth elude thy grasp; therefore trust not seem, I say. For these empty-

seeming mirrors be of that kind, which I do call contracting mirrors, forwhy they do contract into their gaze more than thy gaze can else compass; like to that glass which truth-loving Lucian did find, what time he sailed through the air in a ship for seven days and seven nights; and chancing to land on the moon, there did he find a glass, wherein he did see every city and nation on earth. Now of contracting mirrors there be many kinds; and here in this round glass canst thou see th' image of any city that hath been on earth, in obedience to thy wish; yet that wish exhausted, canst thou see no more i' the glass. Here canst thou see the Athens of Pericles or the Rome of Augustus, the hanging gardens of Babylon or the ziggurats of Ur; so as thy heart desires."

"An entire city? I confess I'm skeptical. Still, if I could see but a single city, it wouldn't be any of the ones you've named. It would be Shakespeare's London."

"Look i' the glass; there shalt thou have thy desire."

As I gazed in the curious mirror, which had a diameter of no more than eight inches, I perceived what appeared to be a faint vapor or cloud, that spread slowly over the glass, darkening it slightly. I bent closer. In the cloudy depths of the glass I saw dim shadowy shapes. Gradually the shapes became more distinct, the cloud dispersed, and I beheld in the mirror an image that made me draw in my breath. For there was all of Shakespeare's London, included at a single glance within the narrow circumference of the mysterious glass. Not only was it visible to my astonished eye in its entire extent, with the great bend of the Thames cutting through the town, as if I were viewing the city from high above; but at the same time it was present in all the perfection of a miraculous and inexhaustible detail. I saw the thatched-roofed houses lining both sides of London Bridge, and a redfaced woman dumping a pail of slops from an upper window. On the boat-thick Thames I saw skiffs and shallops, wherries with embroidered cushions, two-masted pinnaces, lateen-sailed caravels, and a dirty-looking swan dipping its beak into the water. High above the battlements of the Southwark Gate the heads of fourteen traitors stared from the tops of tilted poles. The flag was flying from the Globe Theater. Juliet, a pretty boy, stood on the balcony, while Romeo gazed up ardently from a stage crowded with knights and gentlemen seated on stools. In the pit a tinker's apprentice in a wool cap ate an apple and quaffed from a flagon. A lover and his lass lay in a field outside the northern wall, a sleek brown rat plopped into the Thames, a plump citizen and his wife stood atop the flat stone tower of St. Paul's, looking out over London; and down below, in the crowded churchyard, a lady in a feathered hat looked through a romance at a bookstall upon whose poles hung woodcuts, title pages, and ballads

whose print I could read. I closed my eyes, dizzied with the profusion of detail; when I opened them the scene had vanished, and I gazed at an empty circular mirror with a cracked ebony frame.

"I have a headache, Morpheus. I've never looked into a mirror like that."

"Aye, lad; and some there be, that can make thy brain ache for weeks. For here in this chamber canst thou see all Greece in a glass; and here wilt thou find that mirror that some do call *Speculum Mundi*, wherein all the history o' thy realm is present at one instant, which some seeing, have gone mad. But come away, lad, ere thy brain crack in twain with heedless mirror-gazing."

He now led me briskly from chamber to mirrored chamber, through which further mirrored chambers were always visible; and after a while we came to a region where the chambers were hung with many mirrors of polished metal.

"What are these mirrors, Morph? They seem older than the others."

"Why, they be divining mirrors, lad, of diverse pow'rs. But come, here's one wherein I'd have thee gaze."

He had led me into a long pocket hung with mirrors of brass and copper and bronze; at the end hung a single small round brazen mirror, before which he stopped. In the brightly polished surface I saw the clear image of an old and feeble man, who gazed at me with watery vague eyes. His face was of such an unhealthy pallor that it appeared to be translucent, so that the skull seemed to be pressing through the flesh; yet at the same time there was a slackness about the skin, which hung in small folds at the throat and on the cheek. He was bald save for a few wisps of hair on top. His moist bottom lip hung slackly and yellowish deposits were visible in the corners of his eyes. As I watched, a line of drool trickled from his mouth, and after it came a thin, searching tongue, coated with white. I turned away in disgust.

"Who is this sickly old man, Morpheus? I don't care for him." And I began looking about, as if I might find more pleasing images in the nearby mirrors.

"Dost not know him, lad? 'Tis a glass that hath within such pow'r, as to show back to him who gazeth therein, th' image of himself in old age."

And now in the eyes of the feeble old man I seemed to see a trace of my eyes, and in his bald and narrow skull, blue-veined, the shape of my own head. Sorrow and revulsion in equal measure welled up in me, and angrily I turned away. Somewhat impatiently I said: "But do these mirrors go on forever?"

"'Tis immortality doth go on forever. Be not wroth, lad; for as old Morpheus hath excellently said, though thou be o' the dying kind, yet

hath thy kind a trick of turning away from their mortality, like as ye were gods. Then fear not the bitter glass, but drink down thy dying, and feed on dissolution, an thou wouldst know who thou art, and whither thou goest; for though thou'rt but a lad, yet art thou dying, and time's a truth will not be nay'd."

Even as he spoke I felt my oppression lifting, and in the lightening of my spirit I said gaily: "Why, Morph, you missed your true vocation. You should have been a preacher. 'Sdeath! To hear you speak, one would think the gods themselves were mortal."

To my surprise a shadow of melancholy darkened his eyes. In the torchlight his black robe and pale, heavy face gave him the look of a sorrowing wellfed priest.

"Nay, lad. 'Tis that e'en such a one as old Morpheus can fix his hapless heart on the dying kind: and so immortal bones do feel the heavy change; and undying flesh the sting of mortality."

Stirred by his words, I tried to think how I might comfort him, when all at once he cried: "A plague of all mirrors! Methinks I'll turn monk and lend out my cods as rosary beads. 'Sdeath, what's this?"

Slowly from one of the deep pockets of his robe Morpheus drew forth a nearly full bottle of wine. Holding it up he gazed at it in the light of a torchflame. He cocked his head to one side and appeared to examine the bottle closely. Turning to me with a puzzled frown he said: "Why, lad, 'tis strange. It hath not the look of a Bible, yet did I place the Good Book in my pocket, that I might read to thee, and comfort thee, in times of sorrow and affliction. 'Tis a miracle." Lowering the bottle he began to struggle with the jammed cork, working it slowly back and forth with his thumbs. His face darkened with the effort and a vein stood out on his neck; and as he struggled he said solemnly: "O Lord thou pluckest me out." The wine-wet cork slipped from the bottle. Placing a hand on his heart, and raising high his melancholy eyes, he said: "O swallow swallow." He threw back his head, took a long drink, and wiping his mouth with his robe-sleeve passed the bottle to me. " 'Tis somewhat to gild thy gullet withal; a drop o' belly-tickler and gut-glider; a dash o' dance-i'-the-blood. Drink, lad. Father Morpheus bids thee be well."

I threw back my head and drank greedily, spilling wine on my chin. As I did so Morpheus made a long, slow cross in the air with his forefinger. "In Nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen. Pack it away, lad. Chateau Morphee." As we continued on our way we passed the bottle back and forth.

"But are these mirrors ever going to end? My head's starting to spin with 'em all, or perhaps it's this excellent Chateau Morphée. But answer me this, Father Morpheus: are there lots more mirrors than we've already seen?"

“ ‘Sdeath, lad, an mirrors were virtuous wives, ‘twould be a heavy day for adultery. There be mirrors of many pow’rs, both simple and compounded, such as to elude pinched-nose Analysis wi’s pursed lips and cold spectacles; and though thou hast seen remembering mirrors, contracting mirrors, and divining mirrors, till that thy head doth spin, yet be there more mirror-kinds than thou couldst look at in twenty lifetimes. There be summoning mirrors, wherein thou canst call up i’ the glass whatsoe’er thou dost desire, as Cleopatra, thine ancestors, thy fate, thy death. There be mocking mirrors, which do throw back distorted images of them that look therein, as your uglifying mirror, which doth show thee back ugly, or your Circean mirror, which doth show thee back a snake or swine. There be stealing mirrors, or severing mirrors, which do take possession o’ thy reflection, severing him from obedience to thy person, and endowing him with independent life within the glass. There be threshold mirrors, or those that permit commixture o’ realms, the mirror realm and the mirrored realm; and of this kind is that glass wherethrough Alice doth pass into the mirror world. Forget not fierive mirrors, which be those common mirrors that do hang in books, as that mirror wherein Hamlet bade his mother gaze, or all the mirrors hung on all the walls of all the rooms imagined by Charles Dickens, or what scribbler soe’er, and what they saw at all times, as Little Nell without her bloomers. ‘Sdeath, ‘tis a glassy and reflective place, wherein pride is much thwacked about the sconce, an he watch not. ‘Sglass, do these mirrors never end? Pass it here, lad. I’m dry as a bone.”

We had entered yet another tunnel in the maze of mirrored chambers, when I heard what sounded like a quiet sigh, coming from the chamber we were fast approaching. I glanced at Morpheus, who was frowning at the upheld bottle and appeared not to have heard it. As we entered the chamber I glanced quickly around. The pockets gave an unusually crowded appearance, for in addition to the mirrors on the walls there were many mirrors leaning in thick piles beneath them. The chamber appeared to be empty, yet not all the pockets were entirely visible from where I stood, and some that were visible were dark and shadowy. As I looked about uncertainly I again heard a sigh, this time followed by a soft, plaintive moan. The sounds issued distinctly from one of the pockets on my left, and without hesitation I stepped inside.

2. Mirror Tales

At first glance the pocket appeared empty, but I quickly realized there were numerous places of concealment. Upon the walls on both sides

hung large mirrors framed in dark woods, with heavy scrollwork breaking the lines; they appeared to be bedroom mirrors from old houses. Some half-dozen of them hung on each wall, interspersed with torches. At the far end stood a full-length mirror mounted in swivels in a dulled gilt frame, and against the bottom portion of the walls leaned thick stacks of dusty upright mirrors. Someone might be hidden in the shadowy spaces between the piles, or even behind the swivel mirror at the end.

I began walking slowly along the pocket, glancing at the piles of old mirrors and noticing my dim and shadowy image in the darkened panes. All the mirrors had about them an old and discarded look and barely showed back my image in their dusky glass. Behind me Morpheus sat himself down on the dusty floor between two stacks of cracked mirrors and gave a loud yawn. At the end of the pocket I passed before the backward-tilted cheval-glass, where I saw my cracked and dim reflection, and began walking back. As I passed before the second mirror on my left I heard a gentle sigh. It appeared to issue from the glass itself, and stopping before it I peered intensely into its murky depths.

In the darkened glass I could barely see my shadowy and ghostlike form. The mirror was about three feet wide and four feet high, roughly shield-shaped, with a thick-carved frame of interwoven vines and fruits. I had turned to Morpheus, who was sitting with his head back, his legs out, and the bottle upright above his lips, when again I heard the sigh, and turning back to the mirror I strained to see within. "Hello," I said softly, "hello there, I can hear you a little, but I can't see much in there," and I began to tap lightly against the pane.

"Ah, stop," said a voice, "don't," and I stepped back in perplexity. The voice emerged from the glass itself, yet not from a particular portion of the glass. There followed another sigh, and a deep, heartfelt moan.

"Beg pardon," I said hastily, "I had no idea . . . I didn't mean to hurt you."

"Ah, sir," sighed the mirror, "it wasn't the pain of touch, but the jangling of bruised memory, which made me cry out." And he sighed so deeply that the glass trembled in the frame.

"But why are you so unhappy?" I asked the sad mirror, and after a long pause he replied: "You behold in me a melancholy instance of one who has loved and lost."

" 'Sdeath, lad, 'tis ominous. Wake me in a week."

I threw Morpheus an irritated look, and turning back to the mirror I said softly: "Yes?"

"Thank you, gentle sir. Though I waste in sadness, yet in speech is there easing of grief. O that I might speak with an angel's tongue of the

love between a mirror and his lady! A beautiful lady loves her mirror with a pure flame no human love can kindle, for in him alone can she behold her loveliness; a mirror loves his lady with the craving of the vessel for the fluid that will fill it and the ardor of the eye for the image that gives it sight. Our love is without parallel in the crude world of touch. The act of reflection is more intimate than the comedy of copulation, for the mirror absorbs his lady utterly into the silvery depths of his being, and as it were becomes her—and who shall say what dark, forbidden sensations the lady feels as helplessly, willingly, she is drawn into the secret and sensual depths of her consuming mirror? Ah, sir! She was young, she was beautiful, she loved me with abandon; and I, I loved her as only a mirror can. In the secret glow of her lamps at night she would display to me shamelessly the treasures she withheld from the eyes of all others. Shyly, tremblingly, I took her young body into my depths and showed herself to herself in the full glow and splendor of passionate reflection. Yet always, when it was over, I confess that I felt a faint sadness, a secret doubt, as if . . . For my love, though requited, seemed different from hers. My passion was endless, unabated, all-consuming. The slightest sign of neglect was torment; her absence was a sword twisting in my vitals. How often she would pass before me, with a quick and careless look, and step out of my reach—though but a stride away, she was as inaccessible to my straining sight as the back of my own frame. And those unbearable evenings when, having begun to disrobe before me, she would unaccountably turn away, distracted by some whim, some petty task . . . I pined at her absence. I grew hot and cold in her presence. I was sleepless at night with always unsatisfied yearning. It was not long before the strain began to tell. Unhappy, restless, and always unappeased, I felt in the midst of my fever a certain, how shall I say, a certain . . . tiredness. One night when she stood before me she appeared serious and thoughtful. She moved the lamps of her vanity table closer to me, and I sensed with dread the awful truth: my power of reflection had become impaired with suffering. The moment passed, but the next night I saw her again gazing at me with that searching, dissatisfied look. In the days that followed, those looks never left her. Naked before me, gazing at her image over her own voluptuous and dimpled shoulder, she would betray signs of irritation, directed at me. My knowledge of my inadequacy increased my suffering, and my suffering increased my inadequacy. The end came quickly. One night as she gazed at me with her troubled look, I felt an odd, intimate sensation, such as I had never experienced before. I sensed with dread that something unbearable was about to happen, as humans before being struck by lightning are said to feel a raising of the hairs of the body. I felt, deep inside me, a gentle tearing, a subtle emptying, and

suddenly to my horror I saw, lying before me on the dark, lush carpet . . . And she, staring down at it in amazement, in loathing . . . The next day she appeared with her mother, pointing coldly at me and talking briskly. Both passed up and down before me, in and out of sight. That afternoon I saw the new, shining mirror carried in by two men. I felt myself being taken down from the wall; images tilted crazily, as in a dream; for a while I lost consciousness. When I came to, I found myself in a dark place, gazing at a sloping beam, a blue-eyed doll with a cracked cheek, and a broken violin. I darkened and wasted away; one day I fell over, and saw no more. Now I hang in this place, where all discarded mirrors come; and here I sigh and remember, sigh and remember, a ruined and lovelorn mirror. Thank you, sir. It helps."

I had sunk into such heartfelt and gloomy sympathy with the lovelorn mirror that I was startled by a contemptuous "Hah!" that issued from the mirror directly on his right. It was an old and stern-looking mirror in a thick frame. "Don't waste your pity on that ass," continued the mirror cruelly; and the lovelorn mirror gave such a plaintive sigh that I stepped angrily up to the stern mirror and said: "That was a cruel thing to say." In the dusky glass I saw my frowning face.

"I, cruel! What rubbish, sir. I speak the truth: he's a damn fool. I'll not mince my words, sir, not for you nor any man. I repeat: a fool. A mirror who claims to love his lady, and yet remains ignorant of the art of reflection! An outrage, sir. Come, answer me this. What does a lady like? I'll tell you what a lady likes, sir. She likes a bold, flashing mirror that reflects her to advantage; not a damned moony mirror that spends his time sighing like a broken bellows and ruins himself and her with his damned self-pity. Innocence in these matters will not do, sir. I, cruel! By the four winds, you wrong me. I was a gallant mirror. I do believe I've a touch of the old spark yet. Ah, damme, sir, those were the days. I loved her as a lady loves to be loved, and she gave herself to me entirely. For the true art of reflection lies not in an ignorant casting back of all that's seen, but in a careful choice of what the lady desires to see. In a word, sir: the art of reflection is the art of selection. I concealed her blemishes artfully; I flattered her with all the power of my reflective art. I showed her not as she was, a handsome but faintly flawed lady, but as she wished to be seen. Ah, when she gazed at me, she could think herself the fairest of 'em all. In his youth, a mirror is honest; in riper years it's a failing he'd best correct quickly, if he wishes to keep his lady's love. I, cruel! You wrong me, sir. Indeed you do. Only look in my glass."

And indeed in the dusky glass I saw an image unmistakably myself, yet changed in some subtle way so that it was deeply pleasing to behold; and I could not help turning my face from side to side with

studious approval.

"Oh, it's all well and good for you to talk that way," spoke up a mirror on the wall behind me, to which I now turned, "but to tell you the truth it irritates me. The noble art of reflection! Yes, if your lady's a flawed beauty whose very imperfections can be turned to advantage. But what if your lady happens to be—Ah, sir," he continued, addressing me directly, "you see before you the mirror of an ugly lady. Her love for me knew no bounds. She gazed at me hopefully, earnestly, endlessly; I was forced to focus my pained gaze upon the wilderness of her imperfections. Let us speak, sir of the tortures of reflection, the unwanted intimacies, the inescapable immodesties, the ineluctable lubricities. She was young, but her eyes gazed more at each other than at me. Her thick lips parted over large and out-thrusting teeth. Her nostrils were nests. And let us by all means join hands and sing of the splendors of the night. O Nacht der Liebe! Her breasts were heavy and pendulous and looked like balloons partially filled with water. On one of them was a reddish rash and on the other a small brown growth from which two hairs sprang. Her hips appeared to be of different heights, and as for her smug and horribly hairy belly, a portion of the anatomy which Solomon in his song compares to a heap of wheat set round with lilies—but enough. Enough! She insisted upon disrobing before me. I was forced to behold the blazon of her blemishes by the hour. I had the misfortune of facing her bed and so was unable to turn away my icy and disdainful gaze as she studiously sprawled before me in a parody of voluptuousness. At times I was forced to witness with cold revulsion her solitary abominations, during which her distorted face would become beaded with lecherous dampness. I despised with my soul's deepest purity of venomous loathing the gaping and shaggy cleft of that vulgar vulva, that voluminous and vegetable vagina. As she grew older, as she grew uglier, as she grew lonelier, her passion for me increased. No lovely lady in the pride of her beauty can have spent before the avid eye of her admiring mirror a tenth of the time my ugly lady spent before the glacial gaze of her disgusted glass. And after such a life as that, to be subjected to the whimpers of the mirror of a lovely lady or to cheerful orations on the noble art of reflection! It's hard, sir. I could not keep silent."

"Beauty and ugliness," spoke up another mirror, "are but outward accidents, to which the truly loving mirror is wholly indifferent. Rather is it the hidden soul, glimpsed as a radiance or effulgence through the eyes of the beloved lady, that is the true object of a mirror's time-spurning love. Beauty withers away, but the virtuous soul shines with undiminished brightness through all eternity. If you would love as a mirror should, mark not the outward accident, but the

inward light. My lady was virtuous, and her high virtue shone in her face, irradiating her outward form with inward beauty. Mirror-love is spiritual love: for what after all is the art of reflection but the spiritualization of the corporeal? In that high and holy art, truly understood, the lady is transformed from flesh to spirit. The lady within the glass, raised and refined to an airy dissolution of herself, transcends the grossly material lady without. And as the sense of sight is the highest of the five senses, so is the lady in the glass apprehended by that high sense alone, by which the radiance of the soul is adumbrated to the intellect. For the art of reflection is an art not of the time-bound body, but of the timeless soul."

"My timeless eye!" exclaimed a nearby mirror. "Good God, man. Shut it off and go back to sleep. What lady was ever grateful to her mirror for falling in love with her immortal soul? What the ladies want is to be loved for their all too mortal flesh, with a prayerbook and a crucifix thrown in for good luck. The art of reflection is an art of outer surfaces, a strictly corporeal art—and the ladies know it. I've been around, sir; I know. Sir, I was a lecherous mirror. Do you think I regret it? Why, they loved me; they couldn't get enough of me. I held them spellbound in my shameless and inviting gaze. At the height of my seductive powers I was known to encourage disrobing—*and more*. Ah, jumping Jesus, when a lovely young thing stepped before me at night, and I caught her in my glass—the secret knowledge that passed between us then! I trained my knowing gaze upon her—a look would kindle in her eye—and the complicity of her look, that Mona Lisa smile, as she slowly raised her hand to unclasp her jewels from her pulsing neck! And when she stood all naked before me and turned this way and that—and turned all about to gaze knowingly at me over her pretty shoulder—ah, Christ, I feel the glow of it yet."

A loud yawn issued from the mirror beside him. "Lechery is one of the more charming forms assumed by innocence. Let us speak rather of the boredom of reflection, the ennui of eidola, the acedia of sight. To one who has seen everything, the lovely and the ugly are alike indifferent, and the body and the soul but pieces of colored candy to amuse a boy. As a child I was virtuous. As a youth I was lecherous. In the floodtide of young manhood I was already bored to death. I gazed upon a beautiful and naked lady as a mirror in a desert might gaze upon a dune. For after the billionth revelation, comes the enervation. After the billionth exhibition, comes the inanition. I gazed upon the rich tones of young and vibrant flesh as one imagines a mirror in an empty room to gaze upon the faded violets of the faded wallpaper. What to me is bouncing breast or buttery buttock but an insipid and lopsided solid inanely expressive of inevitable geometrical laws? For after the billionth disclosure, comes the composure. A brief

craving for the charms of vice led to still darker indifferences. Is it a wonder my eye is glazed? For I have seen it all, my friend. I have seen it all. Compared to me, a pillar of brass is an instance of passionate abandon. For after the billionth *mons veneris*, one is not generous. I should have preferred to be a mirror in a marsh, where no wind blows. I should have preferred to be a mirror in a blackened room, reflecting eternal absence."

At this, several mirrors began talking at once, louder and louder, until clapping my hands over my ears I cried: "Quiet!" and instantly there was silence. "To tell you the truth," I then said, looking from mirror to mirror and trying to include them all, "I've never given much thought to the art of reflection; but now I see there's more in a mirror than meets the eye. I wish to thank each of you for your stories, which have taught me a great deal about the art of reflection; and though I'd like to hear more mirror-tales, I'm afraid I've got to be on my way. But before I go, tell me, someone: do all the mirrors of the upper world suffer and fall in love the way you do?"

There was a hushed whispering, and at last a grave voice said: "Young man—for I am one who well may call you young—your question is deeper than you know." The voice came not from one of the mirrors on the wall, but from a large and solemn mirror in front of one of the leaning mirror-piles. I felt awkward standing above him, and moving to a space between piles in the opposite wall I sat down on the dusty ground before the solemn mirror, wherein I saw my dim reflection and part of an edge of the mirror beside me; and after a few moments he continued.

The Four Ages of Mirrors

"In the beginning was the Golden Age of Mirrors. Then was reflection a high and noble art, for only beautiful and harmonious images were visible in the eyes of the mirrors of the world: and all was lovely to behold. The wicked in thought and deed were invisible in the noble mirrors of that time, and not to be reflected was counted a disgrace worse than death. So all men strove to be beautiful in thought and deed, and to shine forth from out the mirrors of that noble time.

"Then came the Silver Age of Mirrors, when ugly and vicious images were first seen upon earth. Faces of wickedness looked forth from out the mirrors of that age, troubling the souls of beholders. Then anger, lust, pride, and greed first showed themselves; yet did noble reflections continue to shine forth brightly. In the mirrors of that age a man could know himself, for they showed him as he was, by his deeds; nor could the wicked escape the knowledge of their wickedness, in the mirrors of the Silver Age.

"Then came the Bronze Age of Mirrors, when distortion first entered the art of reflection. This was the age of creative mirrors, of romantic mirrors, of mirrors with imagination. It was an age that witnessed a feverish and decadent efflorescence of mirrors, a high and dubious flowering of the art of reflection. There arose mirrors which were considered corrupt by those who remembered the simpler mirrors of former ages, yet which charmed and dazzled. It was the age of selective mirrors, which showed back only what they wished, and of dreaming mirrors, which inserted their own dreams into the world. It was the age of jesting mirrors, which tipped over chairs, rearranged rooms, and replaced the heads of gazers with different heads. It was the age of undressing mirrors, which cast back naked reflections of fully dressed beholders, and it was the age of scandalous love-mirrors, which were said to arouse beholders to shameless frenzy. It was the age of suicide mirrors, which flung themselves from walls and dashed out their glass for love of cruel and disdainful ladies. It was the age of walking mirrors, of weeping mirrors, of vanishing mirrors, of Protean mirrors that assumed the shape of whatever they reflected, of fancying mirrors that reflected only imaginary things; and it was an age when the strain of imaginative reflection reached such intensities that mirrors were said to become insane, and reflect back visions of appalling beauty, dangerous to behold. Those who gazed into such mirrors would behave in strange ways, often feverishly and meticulously planning long voyages which they abruptly abandoned.

"One of the more troubling mirrors of this brilliant and unstable age was the devouring mirror, which flourished toward the end, when new lassitudes had led to darker abandons. Young, beautiful, and lonely women were especially vulnerable to these sinister mirrors, which because of their exquisite workmanship were in high demand among moneyed arrivistes still doubtful of social acceptance and anxious to win approval by costly displays of taste. A young woman alone before such a mirror would abandon herself to voluptuous and mystical intensities of gazing that left her drained, -weary, yet ever unsatisfied. To behold herself in such a glass quickly became the central passion of her life. She would spend longer and longer hours in the privacy of her room, gradually and methodically detaching herself from the obligations of society. The practice of prolonged and intense gazing was of course not without consequence, and it was observed that the young woman who had been caught in the clutches of such a mirror became enervated and pale, diminished so to speak by overmuch reflection. It was a striking corollary of such diminishment that her reflection grew richer and brighter, and seemed indeed to thrive in the degree to which she herself fell into decline. The very richness of the reflection served to draw the unfortunate victim more

strongly to her mirror, for in the brilliant depths of that treacherous glass she appeared to flourish with an intense and feverish life. Meanwhile in the eyes of her family she saw reflected only sadness and disappointment. Her translucent and blue-veined pallor, her wasting thinness, her odd listlessness were only the more obvious signs of a debility that soon confined her to her chamber. There, freed at last from the distractions of the outer world, she would be drawn into final transports of frenzied gazing. Daily she would grow weaker and more wasted as her image flourished in insolent and triumphant health. It is said that in the last days she would take on an unearthly and ethereal appearance, as if she had become filled with light. A day came when the grieving parents of such a child would enter her room to discover that their daughter had vanished utterly: but in the dazzling mirror her reflection glowed with unnatural brightness. Some say the victims, toward the end, could feel their vital substance being drawn into the glass: and it is whispered that the final moments of dissolution were of a dark, unspeakable, intolerable voluptuousness.

"The secret lassitude and world-weariness that some say had lain in the heart of that Age produced in many souls a nostalgia for past ages and a vague, troubled yearning for a new and simpler age.

"Then came the Iron Age of Mirrors. In a spasm of revulsion against the reckless frivolities of the preceding age, the art of reflection became icily objective. Mirrors cast back at the world a cold and furiously precise image of itself, spurning all distortion. Outward appearance was now held to be the supreme truth. The faces that looked back from the glass were neither good nor evil, but compositions of shadow and flesh-tone, revealing nothing and concealing nothing. Such were the new mirrors of the Iron Age, which still reigns in the upper world. Some there are who have prophesied a fifth age, which will replace the age of iron. In the coming age, they say, mirrors will no longer reflect the outward appearance, but the inward soul. Even now, it is said, here and there among the mirrors of the Iron Age one of the new mirrors secretly appears: a queen in a northern kingdom is said to have gazed into such a mirror and seen a toad.

"Such, young man, are the four ages of mirrors, which, though it be true, you should perhaps consider but a fable, mumbled by an old mirror in the night."

"Thank you, sir," I said respectfully. "I've listened with great attention to your tale, which I feel has been truly instructive, though I hope you won't take offense if I confess that I can't say precisely how. But I've noticed it's often that way with tales. I'm very pleased to have met you and to have seen myself in your glass. Excuse me for rising

out of sight, but I must be off now if I—Morpheus! Are you awake?"

Morpheus had been leaning back with closed eyes and slackly open mouth in an attitude of drunken stupor, but at my question his eyes opened and he looked up alertly.

"A pox on drunkenness! It doth breed mischief i' the fancy. Why, look thee, Carl, methought I did dream of talking mirrors and such airy trifles, toys fit for a child. 'Sdeath, dreaming hath been the ruin of many a sturdy brain. Up, Morpheus, thou fat-rumped knave! 'Tis sleep hath robbed thee of virtuous waking. Aye, but 'tis virtuous waking doth weary the mind, readying it for slothful sleep. So seems it thus: thou must sleep for to wake and wake for to sleep, and so wear thyself t' the bone with continual interchange of state. Zounds, there's scarce time to draw a peaceful breath in all this hurly-burly of sleeping and waking. Why then, drink up, say I, 'tis small recompense for such a life. Ah, you handsome dog."

This last remark was directed at his dim reflection as it rose into view. Then throwing back his head and taking another swallow, he led me out of the chamber of talking mirrors, now mysteriously still.

PART TWO



OceanofPDF.com

VI. The Tale of Heklo and Ekli



1. *Heklo*

WE came to a stony and inhospitable shore. The stones were sea-smoothed and round, like pebbles, but about the size of baseballs. Morpheus half-carried me to the trees beyond the beach. They were of an immense and incalculable height, and the trunks a good twelve feet across. The smallest leaves were wider than handkerchiefs, which proved a blessing, for some held small pools of rainwater that I drank eagerly. High overhead I saw clusters of fruit. The branches were much too high for us to reach them, but pieces of bruised fruit lay on the ground at the edge of the wood. They looked rather like apples, but were the size of watermelons. "Eat, lad," urged Morpheus, tearing off a thick rind; the fruit was hard and sweet. Morpheus went down to the boat and dragged it up along the clattering stones to the trees. I fed well and rested, sitting on a root as thick as a thigh.

Morpheus sat spitting out pits and watching me closely as my strength returned. The pits were pale disks the size of quarters and rattled nicely against the roots. After a while Morpheus wiped the back of his hand across his mouth and stood up decisively. "Thou'rt fit, lad. Come." With a jerk of his jaw he urged me into the soaring wood. I rose with a mixture of reluctance, excitement, and nervous curiosity. I had made my way around the first immense trunk and was stepping over a high root when I heard a loud cracking and clattering nearby, and a shaggy-tailed creature the size of a small wolf came bounding out of some bushes toward me, turning aside at the last moment to climb a nearby trunk. Though I trembled with fear and loathing, and insisted on turning back, Morpheus appeared unperturbed, saying it was only a harmless squirrel; and assuring me there was nothing to fear, he led me further in.

I advanced with difficulty and revulsion through the lush wood. Pale, spongy mushrooms the size of dinner plates came up to my knees. Thistles as big as pincushions stuck to my robe and tore my hands. Thick, moist ferns rose above my waist and sometimes up to my eyes. The high fronds tickled my cheeks and nose. The spongy

forest floor was matted with sharp pine needles longer than knitting needles, on which lay sharp-edged pinecones the size of pineapples. An overpowering stench of rot and decay streamed into my nostrils from old leaves and mildewing crumbling logs. Once I heard a crashing sound high up in the trees, and covered my head in alarm as an acorn the size of an apple came hurtling down. I passed through a clutching cluster of rubbery plant-stems, and stepped with relief into a sudden clearing.

My relief was short-lived, for in the murky glow of the Morphean heavens I saw, stretched out upon the grass, an immense figure, whom at first I had mistaken for a fallen tree. Morpheus, seeing me draw back in dread, shrugged his shoulders and said: "Come, lad. 'Tis no coarse loutish fellow, as thou mayst see by's attire, but a lad of breeding." As I advanced slowly behind swift-stepping Morpheus I saw that the figure wore a long jacket or frockcoat with glimmering gold buttons the size of silver dollars, waxed black boots, and a ruffled shirt. He lay asleep on his back with one arm over his eyes and one arm flung out on the grass. I followed Morpheus carefully around the great hand, each of whose fingers was the size of my forearm; on one finger he wore a tight-fitting gold ring the size of a bracelet. Morpheus walked all around him, surveying him with an air of amusement. From knee to boot-tip the giant measured about the height of a man.

When he came to the face, Morpheus stood for a few moments gazing impudently with his thumbs stuck in his lapels. Then bending over and breaking off a grassblade about two feet long, he held it out and began tickling the slumberer's cheek. I shook my head in violent protest, but already the shut-eyed giant had begun to stir in his sleep, and suddenly he slapped at his cheek so loudly that I leaped back in alarm. He opened a sleepy eye and stared directly at me. With startling suddenness he sat up and looked down at us. He began moving rapidly backward in a sitting position, pushing furiously with the palms of his hands and kicking up grassclumps with his boot-heels. All at once he scrambled vastly to his feet, snatching up a branch twice my height that lay nearby, and stood brandishing it over his head as if he were about to dash out our brains.

I was so frightened that I could not move, and clutched my journal to me as I stared up at the tree-sized club swirling high overhead. Morpheus, tipping his head back, gazed up cockily. "Why, look thee, methinks the rude fellow doth mean to drive us hence. 'Tis not civil, lad; 'tis not well done. It doth want gentility. 'Sdeath, I'll call him out for this. Wilt be my second? Thirty paces, pistols at dawn. Come, be a sweet lad and deliver my challenge. Nay, thou dost well to restrain me. I'll not have innocent blood on my hands. Do thou speak to him, and tell him to put down his toothpick. What ho, Goliath! Methinks he

hears me not. Ekilan!"

At this last word, shouted up between cupped hands, the giant took an immense stride backward. Still holding up the great club in one hand, he began to bend slowly down toward us, but straightened abruptly. He next reached into his pocket and removed a round metal box the size of a child's drum. Squatting down suddenly, he lowered his club to the grass beside him and opened the rattling box. From it he removed two large objects that he began to strike hard against each other with a frightening noise. Sparks flew; he lowered his face and blew furiously into the box; a flame flashed up. He removed something from his pocket and thrust it into the dying flame. He stood up, bearing with him a new flame. Bending slowly down, he held a flaming stick before him and examined us with an expression of wonder.

Morpheus addressed him again in words I could not understand, and the giant, still bending over with his flame, began shouting so loudly that I had to place my hands over my ears. He seemed to realize the painfulness of his voice and soon lowered it to what I supposed was a whisper, though it sounded quite loud. Morpheus and he talked back and forth, and he very slowly reached out a huge finger to touch our robes. His nail, about the size of a clamshell, was well-trimmed and clean. He then sat down in the grass before us, so that he was scarcely twice my height, and looked back and forth, now bending close to us and now sitting up. All at once he shook out the flame, which had nearly burned his fingers. In the dark, under the glow of the Morphean night sky, he spoke again. Morpheus turned to me. "We're invited to supper, lad. 'Tis a good lad, well read, and doth speak politely. We did give him a scare, but he hath some mettle in him, though uncommon shy. He doth call himself Heklo."

I was reluctant to accept the invitation, for I feared a trap; but it occurred to me that if the giant intended harm he could easily grab hold of us with his great hands and break our little arms. Seated before us he seemed, despite his forbidding and somewhat repellent size, peaceful and well-intentioned, and the face looking down at us displayed only intelligent curiosity. The individual features were disturbing and even menacing—his mouth was more than half a foot wide, and his teeth the size of shot-glasses—but viewed in relation to one another they were far from unpleasing, and indeed suggested a certain refinement.

He rose, gathering up the tinderbox and putting it in his frockcoat pocket. The problem immediately presented itself of how we were to travel to his home. Standing beside him, reaching barely to his knees, I felt like a large doll or small dwarf. Heklo bellowed from above, and Morpheus reported that he had offered to carry each of us on a

shoulder. The thought of sitting so high in the air filled me with alarm, and I protested so vehemently that Morpheus, shrugging with irritation at my timidity, agreed to follow on foot. This was easier said than done, for Heklo's stride was about a dozen feet long, and he had to stop after each step to permit us to catch up with him. In this manner he led us into the forest beyond the clearing. His great boots crushed massive ferns, whose broken stems and smashed, twisted fronds made a fearful impression as I passed, but to my surprise he proved quite considerate of our feelings, and continually bent down to clear the looming underbrush from our path. After a time I began to grow tired of the long struggle through the wood. Heklo bellowed down; Morpheus reported that we were not yet halfway there; and I suggested with irritable misgiving that perhaps we should accept the ride on his shoulders.

It happened quickly: the great hand came sweeping down, and Morpheus rose into the air like a fat bird and sat waving down at me from above. Suddenly I felt myself grasped painfully about the ribs and lifted up in a dizzying arc, till I found myself perched on the great shoulder some two dozen feet above the ground, with my legs dangling in front. The giant placed a hand on my legs while I clung desperately to the thick collar of his coat. Morpheus waved gaily from the other shoulder, and Heklo set off at what seemed a terrific pace, bumping me dangerously up and down and once nearly losing me altogether.

I was relieved to see yellow lights in the distance, and then a great wooden dwelling came into view among the colossal trees. Heklo swung us down and we entered through a doorway some thirty feet high. The vast room, smelling sharply of fresh wood, was well furnished. I saw a central table twice my height, with unpainted wooden legs as thick as rafters; an armchair whose cushion was several feet above my head; beside it a lofty end-table with a blazing oil lamp the size of a Franklin stove; a high, oppressive yellow couch; against one wall a broad, dark, and towering piece of furniture that I recognized suddenly as a piano; and a terrifying fireplace with a raging fire. Far overhead great beams flickered in flamelight. Before a curtained window hung a cage the size of a barrel, containing a yellow bird larger than a pigeon. "What say'st thou, lad? Though 'tis but a wee cabin i' the wood, methinks 'twill serve." Despite Morpheus' bantering manner, I realized that indeed the vast dwelling was a rude cabin in the wood, and the mighty room rising nave-like over me a cozy cabin parlor.

2. Brother and Sister

Heklo bellowed something and strode toward a door, shaking the floor each time one of his heavy boots came crashing down. He entered a second room and closed the door thunderously behind him. Through the door I heard his lowered voice, and creaking sounds, and a short time later the door opened and he emerged with a soaring young woman on his arm. Despite her vast size, for her head came up to his shoulder, she leaned as if weakly against him. She wore a long coarse dress that came down to her thick slippers; she had dark hair and a strikingly pale face. From where I stood, looking up at her in the shadowy flamelight, she seemed to wear an expression of sorrow. Her eyes were dark and red-rimmed, and beneath them were bluish shadows. Heklo spoke again. Morpheus explained that she was his sister, that her name was Ekli, and that she was not feeling well. Still leaning on his arm, she made her immense way to the great couch; and half-sitting and half-lying back against two puffy pillows, she gazed down at us with melancholy eyes as wide as teacups. When Morpheus shouted up at her she seemed for a moment wonderstruck, and looked at both of us with sudden interest, but after a time she lapsed back into a kind of indolence. Once she said something; Morpheus reported that she wished to know our names, for although she had read about dwarfs she had never seen any.

She remained on the yellow couch during supper, and despite her brother's urgings refused to eat. Heklo proved a considerate and attentive host, and would not rest until he had settled us at the table to our satisfaction. He carefully lifted us in turn onto the high wooden chairs, but it was immediately clear that even standing up we could barely see over the top of the table. He at once left the room with his great, terrifying strides, and returned bearing an armful of books, each of which was nearly a foot thick. When I stood on two of the books I had a good view of the table, with its wooden peppermill thick as a stairpost, its towering wineglasses whose glistening stems seemed too frail to hold the basins of blood-red liquid suspended above my head, and a pair of high silver candlesticks from which rose candles thick as rolling pins, taller than walking sticks. But the rim of the great soupbowl before me being a foot above the tabletop, it was necessary to add a third book to the pile. The spoon proved impractical, for it was as long as my arm and its bowl too large for my mouth. Heklo seeing the difficulty, placed before us silver glasses scarcely four inches high, which I guessed to be thimbles; and spooning the steaming soup carefully into the thimbles, and cutting up the great slices of black bread into manageable pieces, he triumphantly presented us each with a little measuring spoon, not much larger than an ordinary tablespoon.

The main course consisted of roast pheasant the size of a calf.

During the meal Morpheus and Heklo engaged in loud and lively conversation, while I ate silently and gazed from time to time across the table at the sad giantess on her couch. She appeared to listen with a wavering interest, sometimes sighing to herself, and sometimes raising her melancholy teacup-eyes to look at the curious little creatures standing on chairs at the table. If, at these moments, she happened to meet my gaze, she at once lowered her eyelids.

After dinner Heklo helped each of us onto his high armchair, showing great delicacy. Instead of lifting us in his hands, which I could not bear, he placed three books at the base of the armchair, and two books before them, and one book before the two, forming three steps that led up to the cushion. We were thus able to climb onto the chair unaided. As I stepped onto the soft and sagging cushion I was reminded of the bed of Morpheus; and removing my slippers, I made my way to a chair-arm and sat down with my back against it, my legs stretched out, and my head turned sideways toward the front of the chair.

Heklo sat down before us on the floor, but seemed disturbed that his head still rose above us. At last he stretched out his legs and lay back on both elbows, so that his eyes were on a level with ours. Suddenly he reached into a pocket and removed a flat round silver box the size of a saucer. Opening it carefully he held it out to Morpheus and me. The box contained an unpleasant-smelling coarse-grained powder. To my surprise, Morpheus took some up between his thumb and forefinger, crushed it into finer grains, and, bringing it to his nose, snuffed it up. This seemed to delight Heklo, who urged me to do likewise, but I refused. Morpheus then withdrew from his pocket and handed to Heklo the black pipe he had carried with him on our voyage. Holding it carefully in his palm, for it was about the length of two finger-joints, Heklo examined it with extreme interest. A moment later he sprang up with terrifying suddenness, strode crashingly from the room, and returned with a great pipe-rack containing half a dozen curving pipes about two feet long, with bowls the size of beermugs. Morpheus chose a pipe for himself, and then one for me, saying I could rest the bowl on my leg; and from a pocket Heklo produced a tobacco pouch the size of a handbag, which he held open for us. He next lit a foot-long spill at a candle and held the flame over each of our bowls in turn. " 'Sdeath, 'twill dizzy me," remarked Morpheus as he began puffing away. "Careful, lad, lest thou suck up more smoke than a chimney sucks from a hearth." But the tobacco was so harsh that after a few puffs I was content to let the heavy pipe go out.

Morpheus and Heklo continued their animated talk, which was punctuated by bursts of laughter so loud that I was forced to press my fingers against my earflaps, while I sat looking about with interest.

Ekli once seemed about to say something, but did not speak. After a while she spoke in a voice so low that even I could scarcely hear her; but Heklo at once rose and walked over to her, while Morpheus explained that she had a headache and had offered her apologies before retiring. Her silent suffering had made a strong impression on me, and at his words I rose to my feet on the cushion, resting my hands on my pipe as if it were a cane. I said that I was sorry to hear she was not feeling well, and that I hoped we had not aggravated her headache by our talk and smoke; and I thanked her for her hospitality, and wished her a speedy recovery. My words, when Morpheus loudly repeated them, seemed to please brother and sister; he bowed lightly, and she, pressing the back of a hand against her forehead, and staring down at me for a moment with a dark and melancholy gaze, murmured a few words, which Morpheus translated as "You are very kind." Heklo then accompanied his sister to her room, and returned to the parlor, where he flung himself again on the floor and told Morpheus her unfortunate story.

Heklo was twenty-two and his sister eighteen. They had been raised in the customary manner of their class, spending their summers in the country and the rest of the year in town, on a fashionable avenue in the heart of the capital. These were not the only divisions in a life devoted to extremes of pleasure and duty; and Heklo, like most young swells of his set, was capable of combining fancy-dress balls and exuberant amours with long hours of study and serious cultivation of the inner life. At the university he had at first lived the riotous and drunken life expected of a young giant of breeding, but about halfway through he had grown more solitary and serious, seeking out friends of intellectual worth; and among these few was a melancholy poet of solitary, reflective, and somewhat eccentric habits, who was fond of comparing poems to women, usually to the latter's disadvantage, who seemed never to sleep, who wore a curious sort of floppy broad-brimmed hat, and who, disdaining the active life, praised the university for unfitting its students for anything but a life of ineffectual idleness. Heklo and he were soon inseparable. He was always welcome at the house in town, where his wry wit and gentle manner quickly made him a favorite, and where he proved not indifferent to the charms of Heklo's earnest and rather dreamy sixteen-year-old sister. She began to look forward to his visits, and it was soon clear that she was smitten. Whether he too was smitten was more difficult to say; certainly a rare animation came over him in her presence, and his talk seemed to become charged with mysterious meanings. He was always hanging about her, and writing witty notes to her, and one day he invited her to a dance. Heklo's father was fond of his sister's melancholy suitor but wanted to know how he intended to support

himself. "Some way or the other, I suppose," was not an answer well calculated to amuse him. The father was intelligent enough not to oppose his daughter's choice openly, but his secret opposition made itself felt, and only fed the flame of Ekli's ardent love.

At the age of twenty-one Heklo took his degree and went to the house in the country, where his friend soon joined him; and that summer the three of them led a life of exhilarating idleness. She had fallen so deeply in love that she was in a dangerous state; and her father, seeing how it was with her, struggled to overcome his doubts. For his beloved daughter's sake he determined to accept the boy as his son-in-law and find him some suitable occupation. Daily they awaited the gentle suitor's request for Ekli's hand in marriage. But the poetical lover seemed content to stroll in the fields with her, and recite verses, and lie in the grass twirling a stem in his teeth. Ekli seemed lifted into a realm of enchantment; at times she appeared feverish with joy, and would hug her old nursemaid suddenly and for no reason. One morning the household awoke to find the lover gone. He had left a note for Heklo, thanking him and his family for their hospitality, and saying that the time had come for him to go off and confront his destiny. He would always think of Ekli fondly. Ekli at first did not understand, and demanded to see the note. She sat reading it for a long time, and finally began to tear it in half, but stopped. Heklo remembered one striking detail: she began to blush, as if an improper story had been told in her presence.

She did not weep, or miss meals, but from that time on she began to spend long hours in her room. She was no longer the same. It was as if someone else had taken up residence inside her, or as if the young, laughing girl who had always inhabited her had gone away silently, leaving behind a smooth bed and a bureau with clothes neatly folded in all the drawers. Heklo himself was deeply wounded by his friend's abrupt departure; moreover, he considered himself responsible for Ekli's suffering, since it was he who had invited the deceiver to his home. He thought of demanding satisfaction, but felt he could solve nothing by putting a bullet through his former friend's forehead; his own heart was too bruised for such antics, and in any case the friend had vanished completely. He hoped his sister would recover. When she did not, and the family doctor prescribed a change of air, Heklo proposed to take her to a cabin in the country, near the shore, and keep her company in the bosom of Nature, which he hoped would refresh them both. The crude cabin had been supplied with a few mementoes of civilized life, such as the piano and the silver candlesticks, but otherwise they lived the rural life entirely, eating vegetables they grew themselves and an occasional pheasant or squirrel that he was able to bring down with his dueling pistols. Ekli seemed to be recovering

slowly, but she was far from well, and sometimes he wondered whether it had been a mistake to drag her into these desolate parts. Our visit was a godsend. For the first time since his friend's treachery, he had seen a shadow of pleasure pass over her face. He begged us to remain as guests for a while, not only for his poor sister's sake, but for his sake, too. He realized full well that he must seem coarse and monstrous to us, but he assured us that he was a rational civilized creature such as ourselves, and would be honored by our company; for though he had several times seen creatures of our kind in small boats at sea, he had never been privileged to speak with them before, and longed to know something of our habits and customs.

When Morpheus proffered Heklo's invitation, I accepted so eagerly that I took myself by surprise. I had been touched by the story of the melancholy giantess, and I was pleased to do her a service, however slight. But it occurred to me that quite apart from his sister, the warmth of Heklo's proposal soothed me, for in the rich and always alluring realm of Morpheus I felt myself still a stranger, looked on mistrustfully by creatures not of my kind.

The cabin's third room was Heklo's vast bedroom, which he referred to as a box and which was almost entirely taken up by his enormous bed. The ceiling sloped on one side so that he could not stand at his full height. He offered us, with apologies, one corner of the room, which he set off by stretching a rope between a towering chest of drawers and a bookcase, and then hanging a great blanket from the rope. The resulting space was about the size of a small bedroom, though with an oppressively high ceiling; this defect he remedied by placing a sheet over the top, fastening it to the rope at one end and a trunk or chest at the other. For beds he provided us with soft pillows about ten feet long; for sheets, silk handkerchiefs; for blankets, linen table napkins. He gave us two fat candlestubs, in little candlesticks scarcely a foot high; and wishing us a good night's rest, he let the curtain fall, so that I felt a rush of wind on my face.

For a long while I lay awake, listening to Heklo's loud breathing and the fearful sounds of the forest: shrill hoots and cries, strange creakings, sudden scampers and rustles. I felt that I would never fall asleep; and restlessly opening my eyes I saw that Morpheus was gone, I heard voices in the parlor and a clatter of cups in saucers, and sitting up abruptly I marveled at my long, deep sleep.

3. Friendship

When I entered the main room I saw Heklo at the table and Morpheus on the tabletop, engaged in lively conversation. Morpheus was sitting

on an inverted cup and leaning back against a vast pitcher of milk. Ekli was half-reclining on her couch, looking directly at me as I entered; she seemed startled at seeing me, and quickly averted her eyes, though not before I had begun to bow. I noticed that a simple breakfast was set upon a table before the couch, and showed signs of having been touched. Heklo was sitting with his back to me, and Morpheus was making some emphatic point, so that neither happened to notice me, and for a moment I had the uncomfortable cold sense of being shut out. I glanced at Ekli and saw her looking anxiously at her brother, whom she urgently addressed. Heklo at once turned to greet me—Morpheus urged me to come on up—and as Heklo indicated the stairway of books beside one of the wooden chairs, by which I was able to climb to a second stairway of books on the chair seat, and from there to the table itself, I could not help being struck by the sensitivity of the giantess to my momentary distress.

After breakfast Heklo proposed to show us their garden. He appeared delighted when Ekli silently accompanied us to the plot at the back of the cabin. There the heads of lettuce came over my knees, and the tomato vines rose far above me, bearing fruit larger than cantaloupes. I was repelled by the sight of several thick, slick worms the size of garden snakes, which slithered among dirt-clumps and crawled over the cucumber vines, leaving visible trails of slime; and here and there thick-winged flies fatter than bumblebees flew loudly about, settling upon a lettuce-head or rough-skinned cucumber to rub their hairy-looking legs. The garden gave off a rich, acrid, dizzying smell of greenness, as if I had thrust my face into a pile of newmown grass, and I was greatly relieved when the little tour ended.

Heklo seemed aburst with energy—I had the sense that caring for his sister had proved rather confining for him—and he next proposed that we take a walk to a nearby spot in the woods. This occasioned a discussion concerning how we might best be conveyed, I refusing absolutely to risk another ride on his shoulder. It was Ekli who suggested the answer: we should all walk, since it wasn't far. I could see from Heklo's face, whose expressions I was able to read more and more readily, that he was surprised and pleased that she should be coming along. All four of us set forth, Heklo and Ekli leading the way. Heklo carried a great iron-and-glass lantern, big as a trunk, that threw long shadows as it swung. The dirt path proved passable enough, except for an occasional clump of weeds that came up to my neck, and I think I would have enjoyed my child's-eye view of things had it not been for the frightening mosquitoes, the size of wasps, that buzzed loudly around me and drew great red itching bumps on my hands and neck. Ekli, seeing my misery, began shooing away the mosquitoes ineffectually with great sweeps of her dangerous hands, and at last,

with a loud shaking of skirts, ran back to the house and returned with an immense pink handkerchief, which she urged me to place over my head. Nearly choking with the stench of perfume, I continued half-hidden under that pink canopy, which gave some relief when I drew it over my nose and mouth and concealed my hands beneath its ample length. Morpheus, who seemed untroubled by the mosquitoes, pretended to think I was an Arab girl. So we walked on, Heklo and Ekli and Morpheus and I, the two giants stopping after every few steps to turn around and await us anxiously. I felt like a small child, toddling along after kindly grown-ups.

The path led to a rugged glade, with a bubbling spring and great mossy boulders and a dark pool the size of a lake. Ekli spread a cloth for Morpheus and me on the rough grass before the lake-pool; she herself sat down on the grass on one side of us, and Heklo lay back on his elbows on the other side. He passed out pipes, which we lit by long spills held in the lantern-flame; when I let my beermug pipe go out, Morpheus handed me the small black pipe from his pocket. I crushed the coarse shreds of tobacco carefully between thumb and forefinger before filling the little bowl; the pipe drew well, though the tobacco was harsh on my tongue. For a while Morpheus, Heklo, and I sat smoking peacefully in the summery dark air, while Ekli sat in what seemed a contented silence. The bubbling water, the crackling tobacco-bits, the soft popping sounds made by our lips, the creak of branches and the gentle racket of wind-stirred leaves soothed me deeply, and I felt a kind of energetic peacefulness flowing from me and rising with the curls of smoke. I felt so soothed, so vitally at peace, that it seemed to me I must have been sorer in spirit than I knew. Yes, I was grateful to rest, after so much voyaging. When Morpheus and Heklo began to speak, I asked whether I might learn a few words of Heklo's tongue. My attempts at pronunciation seemed to delight Ekli, who began teaching me a little too rapidly the names of everything in sight; and Morpheus said that she had offered to teach me her language, if I would teach her mine in return.

To this I readily agreed; and from that time we began to be much in each other's company. Morpheus and Heklo seemed to have struck up a lively friendship and were content to leave us to ourselves. Each morning when I woke I would hear voices in the adjoining room, and stepping through the door I would find Morpheus and Heklo in the midst of spirited conversation, while Ekli, no longer seated on the couch but at the table, stared with silent welcome in my direction. It was as if, stepping through that door, I were entering not so much the room as Ekli's dark, expectant gaze. After breakfast she and I would ramble off to the nearby glade, or some other rural retreat, and pursue our studies in the tremulous light of the iron-and-glass lantern. When I

stood, the lantern came up to my waist; sitting, I sometimes leaned back against the flame-warmed glass. It became quickly clear that she was a far better student than I. I was able to learn the names of familiar objects easily enough, and I soon was able to recognize a handful of phrases, but aside from isolated words I could not speak at all. She for her part learned English with remarkable quickness, listening to whatever I said with a kind of passionate attention and apparently unable to forget anything at all. We began to speak in English, and I confess that my study of the language of the giants never passed beyond the mere accumulation of simple vocabulary, much of which I quickly forgot—although she never tired of praising my pronunciation, and expressing genuine pleasure in my progress.

I felt for her a warm, brotherly tenderness. She herself seemed strangely grateful for every slightest attention. Once, when I picked an enormous flower for her, she held it in her hand and stared at it a long time before putting it in her hair—an action that I found a little disturbing, for the thick stem had seemed to me not only rough and bristly but somewhat dirty and sticky, especially at the place where I had broken it off. At the same time she took pleasure in performing any little service for me. One evening at dinner, when a button dropped from my shirt, she begged for permission to sew it back on. In my room before bedtime I gave the shirt to Heklo, for his sister. When she returned it the next day, she had not only sewn on that button but had removed and resewn all the other buttons, some of which had come loose during my long journey; and only later did it occur to me that she must have painstakingly unraveled the coarse giant-thread, in order to sew on my little buttons with delicate strands. One morning, entering the main room for breakfast, I had the sudden sense that she looked different. And only afterward, when Heklo remarked on it, did I realize that she had let down her long dark-brown hair.

Often, when we returned from the glade, we would find Morpheus and Heklo still at the table, talking away. Even when all four of us took a picnic lunch to some nearby spot, the two of them would fall readily into interminable talk; and their friendship helped to further our own. I was naturally curious about those long conversations, which Morpheus discussed with me when we were alone. It appeared they were philosophical and speculative, ranging far and wide; but one subject much on Heklo's mind was the nature and temperament of his race. Evidently the presence of Morpheus and me had thrown him into a deep muse. He had, in fact, confessed to Morpheus that in the presence of other, smaller races, members of the giant race experienced an acute self-consciousness and self-dislike. At such times they perceived themselves to be coarse, clumsy, and unpleasantly physical—as if, in creatures of such great size as

themselves, delicacy of feeling and indeed the spiritual life in general were comically inappropriate. It was true that many smaller races were crude, savage, and uncivilized in comparison with theirs, but this did not prevent the giants from feeling an immediate, profound sense of coarseness in the presence even of such unworthy creatures; and in the presence of such creatures as ourselves, who were civilized and well-spoken, the sense of self-revulsion was sharp and inescapable. Philosophers of their race had studied this problem exhaustively yet inconclusively. A debate raged over whether the giants' feeling of self-loathing in the presence of smaller races arose solely through that presence, and was therefore accidental and superficial, or whether smaller races awakened in giants a sense of coarseness that was inherent in largeness itself. Several sects, grimly determined to evade self-doubt, lived in isolated communities that refused all intercourse with smaller races. But in Heklo's view such attempts were utterly wrongheaded, first because the smaller races could be avoided only by a continual vigilance which by its very nature revealed that the creatures to be avoided were ineluctably present in the minds of the evaders, and second because even if the smaller races did not exist, the idea of smallness could not be eradicated from the imagination of the race, who from the earliest era of recorded poetry had populated their epics with a multitude of miniature races. Moreover, even if such isolated sects did succeed in banishing the idea of smallness from their minds, and even if the idea of smallness should magically be eradicated from the mind of the race, the problem would by no means vanish, since in sober fact smaller races did exist and would continue to shock the race of giants into agonized self-awareness.

But even apart from these arguments and considerations, it was abundantly clear to Heklo, and to most of his race, that the race of giants had what might be called an obsession with smallness, with fineness, with the opposite of hugeness—an obsession revealed in every sphere of artistic and practical activity. Giant goldsmiths, ivorysmiths, and wood-carvers, for example, were noted for their small, exquisite, and delicately ornamented objects, such as snuffboxes, thimbles, brooches, and miniature figures; and giant watchmakers commanded a reputation throughout the islands of Lower Ocean as masters of their elegant craft. The lower orders of giants, as well as the educated classes, were noted for their passionate love of miniatures; no peasant home was without its array of peachpit animals and ivory figurines. On a less obvious but no less revealing plane, he wished to point out that their own critics of the various arts continually praised all effects that were subtle, delicate, and elegant. And it was well known that giants and giantesses were particularly sensitive to touch, and could not bear to have any but soft and fine

clothes next to their skin—a fastidiousness that showed itself in many other guises as well, and to the student of such matters could not but reveal a spiritual dissatisfaction: a hatred of coarseness, a striving for purity, a yearning to overcome hugeness. In this sense his was an anxious race—a riven race—indeed, he believed it was nothing less than a tormented race.

These ideas were of the deepest interest to me, and helped to explain certain curious traits I had observed in Ekli. I had noticed from the beginning that she was extremely careful not to alarm me in any way—by any abrupt movement, for example, or any loud sound. She had even, several times, begun to break into laughter, and at once suppressed it. I had assumed that in such instances she was simply displaying her keen sensitivity to my possible fears. But now it struck me that her sensitivity had in it a touch of her own fear: that I might find her too large, too boisterous. In the same way, although she was fond of walking, she seemed troubled whenever we set off together, for then the difference in our sizes was grotesquely apparent; and whereas I had grown quickly accustomed to that difference, she seemed to become increasingly conscious of it, and was always contriving ways to diminish it. One morning after breakfast she proposed, in her shy and hesitating way, that I climb into a green cloth sack, which she had carefully stuffed with rather coarse clumps of cotton. Her plan was to fasten the sack to her shoulders and carry me in it on her back. I protested firmly, but she was so crestfallen that I soon relented, and climbing awkwardly into the sack, with its shifting support of cotton, I permitted myself to be lifted several stories into the air and carried awkwardly along on her back. This episode served only to increase my sense of her hugeness, and I refused to repeat it, saying only that I feared heights. I was deeply pleased to walk on firm ground again, even though she towered beside me; I suppose she sensed her vastness whenever she looked down at me from above, and had tried to diminish our differences by keeping the distance between our faces as short as possible. Whenever we did go for a walk, to one of the retreats where we liked to write and talk, she would always lie down on her side or stomach, so that we could speak comfortably, at nearly the same height; she herself spoke in what I recognized to be the whisper of her race, and tried always to conceal her physical discomfort, for it was something of a strain for her to lie on the ground like that for long stretches of time. And the closeness she strove for was a strain in other ways, too, for I could tell by the many small and disparaging remarks she made about herself that she feared her proximity would reveal blemishes to my miniature eyes.

She was obsessively clean. She was always washing her hair and scrubbing her face and hands, as if trying to remove particles of dirt so

small that she herself could not see them; and she covered herself with powerful perfumes that almost choked me, as if she feared that her natural smell might be offensive to my tiny, delicate nostrils.

Even our daily ceremony of leave-taking seemed to confuse and distress her. It was she who had initiated the custom of shaking hands upon parting; and though I had grown quite used to her large but soft and fresh-smelling fingers, each of which was as wide as my wrist, she always appeared hesitant and half-reluctant to reach her hand to me, sometimes withdrawing it in the act of reaching, in order to rub the palm on her dress, as if she had noticed a moistness that I might find offensive.

Her extreme sensitivity, though touching and oddly moving to me, was also exhausting, and I was continually on the alert to contrive ways in which to assure her that her great size was not repugnant to me. This was not always easy to do, for although it is true that in many ways I had grown accustomed to her, nevertheless there were moments when I became disturbingly aware of her enormousness. These were likely to be moments when she herself seemed to lose her shy self-consciousness in the surge of an enthusiasm. Once when we were walking in the forest beyond the glade, she suddenly clapped her hands together—a startling sound—and seeming to forget me she stepped violently away, bent over abruptly, and returned with an immense yellow wildflower that she had spied by the root of a tree. This display of exuberance made her seem vast and unpleasantly strange to me, perhaps because the suddenness of her outburst reminded me of her dangerous power. Or perhaps it was simply that her display of girlishness contrasted too sharply with her bigness, as if girlish pleasure in a flower were suitable only for someone much smaller. This of course was nonsense, as I reproachfully reminded myself, for she was only eighteen, and entitled to the same girlish outbursts that would have enchanted me if they had been expressed by someone five feet high; yet I could not overcome a troubling sense of discrepancy.

Aside from these occasional displays of playfulness, there was the matter of a very occasional carelessness, which also disturbed me, though for somewhat different reasons. She was shy and modest by nature, and her shyness and modesty were only increased by my presence, since she continually imagined that in various ways she must be offensive to a small, delicate creature such as myself; yet despite prodigious feats of imagination she sometimes failed to foresee small matters that were bound to disturb me. She wore long, modest dresses that came down to her ankles. She did not always lie down in the glade, for the position was tiring for her, and once, sitting up for a while and drawing up her knees, each of which was as broad as my

chest, and embracing her knees with her arms, she failed to tug the front hem of her dress all the way down to her feet, so that it came down only to mid-calf. If I had been a giant, sitting on the ground across from her, I would have seen a bashful young giantess sitting in lantern-light with her arms about her knees and her dress falling modestly low. But since, sitting across from her, I reached to only half the height of her knees, the front hem of her dress was on the same level as my eyes, and before I turned my face away I saw, or did not so much see as sense, dim and intimate tracts of flesh, which threw me into an anguish of melancholy. The sudden and startling thought of Ekli as a sexual being, far from drawing me closer to her, seemed to sunder us; and for a moment I became sharply aware of her alien and grotesque vastness.

4. Developments

One day when Ekli and I returned from a studious sojourn in the glade, during which I wrote in my journal and she in her diary, we found Morpheus and Heklo deep in discussion. Across Morpheus' knees lay a black tube, about four feet long and six inches thick, which I looked at with puzzlement. " 'Sdeath, lad," cried Morpheus, "hast ne'er seen a spyglass?" He and Heklo had been discussing largeness and smallness—a subject of which Heklo never tired—and in order to make a point, Heklo had brought out an old spyglass that he made use of occasionally to observe the night sky or, from a nearby hilltop, the surrounding countryside and ocean.

Morpheus lifted the heavy tube with some difficulty and urged me to stay put. Awkwardly drawing it out to twice its length he suddenly cried: "Why, I have thee, lad! Old Morpheus hath got thee by the glass! Why, thou'rt gigantified—methinks thou'rt tremendous. Come, Heklo, see if 'tis not a giant indeed." Morpheus occasionally spoke English to Heklo, who could understand a good deal and could even speak haltingly, though unlike Ekli he preferred to speak his own tongue.

Heklo took up the spyglass, which in his hands revealed itself to be a rather small one, and observed me with interest. Morpheus then had me sit in the great armchair with the heavy tube propped on my raised knees, and requested me to observe Heklo through the end that diminished rather than enlarged. Both seemed eager to hear my opinion concerning whether a giant diminished still kept the appearance of a giant, or whether he had the appearance of a human creature. I was unable to shed light on the problem, because it seemed to me that through the spyglass Heklo looked like a giant seen in the distance—an opinion that amused Heklo but exasperated Morpheus,

who asked me to observe himself and then Ekli through both ends of the glass and tell my impression. I looked at miniature Morpheus and gigantic Morpheus, and then moved the tube to gaze at miniature Ekli, who at once lowered her eyes—and I was gripped by wonder, for through the diminishing lenses she appeared delicate and lovely. I looked up in confusion, startled to see her gigantic face. Clumsily I lowered the heavy tube to the cushion, saying I could draw no conclusions from this little game.

Throwing up his hands in exasperation, Morpheus asked Ekli to observe her brother and me through the opposite ends of the glass. She laughed when she turned the glass toward Heklo, saying her brother had the look of Okol, a dwarfish character in a fairytale. Turning then to me, she began to study me through the other end. She said nothing at all; and I felt a sudden, sharp embarrassment. She continued to study me gravely, until Heklo spoke. With a start she lowered the glass and handed it quickly back, saying only that one of the lenses had a smudge. Morpheus concluded that we were all mad, and proposed that we hang ourselves.

The next day after breakfast Ekli carried a picnic basket, the lantern, and her diary, and I my little journal and pipe, to the nearby glade, where settling ourselves in our favorite writing spots we set to work. I was now writing in two different portions of my journal: continuing the record of my journey through the Morphean realm in one part, and in the other part recording impressions and conversations of the moment. The bubbling spring, the trembling yellow light of the great lantern in the darkness, the shadowy and mossy rocks, the presence of Ekli, all these soothed and comforted me, and seemed to aid my concentration. She too worked diligently away, stopping from time to time to fall into a muse. After what must have been several hours we grew hungry. Ekli removed the napkin that covered the eight-foot-long picnic basket. She lifted out some fruit, a great loaf of fresh-baked bread, a head of knee-high lettuce, the spyglass, and two tomatoes the size of cabbages. I was startled to see the spyglass. She said she had found it lying in a corner of the couch, where the ‘philosophers’ had abandoned it. Her brother had urged her, for heaven’s sake, to take it with her and look at squirrels or nightingales, because the sight of it gave him a splitting headache.

She put it to her eye and looked up at the night sky, then turned to an overhanging branch, then swung the spyglass to me. Lowering it with a slight frown, she asked whether I would mind moving back, against that tree there—I was so close that it was difficult to focus. I walked a long way across the glade and sat down against the tree. Ekli rose, moved the lantern toward me, and returned to her spot. As I sat in the dim glow of lantern-light, I tried to imagine how I looked to her

in the spyglass. Could she see only my face, grown gigantic and suddenly close? Could she see my nostrils, my eyes, my individual eyelashes? And yet, in order to magnify me and bring me close, she had had to move me across the glade. And she herself, sitting at an unaccustomed distance from me, seemed for a deceptive moment a young woman of my own size, seated under a tree. But the mere thought that she was my own size was enough to shatter the illusion, for had she been my size she would, at that distance, have appeared much smaller; so that, seated far away from me, she now seemed even larger than when she sat towering at my side.

These confusions were interrupted when she lowered the glass and called me over to her. She raised and lowered the glass several times as I strolled over, and gazed musingly at me when I arrived beside her. Without a word she handed the heavy glass to me, as if it were understood between us that I was to observe her in return. As I carried it away, cradling it in both arms, I kept turning, lowering the spyglass to the ground, and lying on my stomach to peer through it at her feet, until I found a satisfactory distance. There I sat down, and resting the heavy tube on my raised knees I focused upon a miniature Ekli. In her littleness she seemed graspable, almost palpable—yet at the same time she seemed so far away that I could never reach her. So for a long while I gazed at that tiny, delicate, and distant image, through the distorting glass.

In the evenings, after dinner, the four of us would sit in the main room of the cabin, or walk to the glade and sit there. Ekli would take out her enormous knitting needles, while Morpheus and Heklo lit up their big pipes, and I the small one. After a little idle conversation, Morpheus and Heklo would return to their more speculative talk, which I was pretty well able to follow, since Heklo took pains to speak a halting sort of English in my presence. He spoke of many things, but one evening, when the four of us were sitting in the cabin, he returned to a theme that was evidently of great importance to him, since he had mentioned it more than once: the false reputation of giants among races such as my own. He explained carefully that giants are mild and peaceful by nature. This was not to say that anger was unknown to them; but their anger, like their joy, was not unnatural or excessive, and seemed terrible only when witnessed by smaller races, who apparently were never able to remember anything else. Human beings in particular had, in their literature, portrayed the race of giants with an awesome disregard for the truth—as if giants were nothing but enormous malignant dwarfs. It was unfortunately true—he did not wish to replace one lie with another—that giants occasionally had mistreated human visitors, although in defense of his peace-loving race he felt obliged to point out that injuries done to human visitors

had usually proved, upon investigation, to be the result of carelessness or accident, rather than malice. Retaliation for unprovoked attacks was another and less pardonable motive, and of course there was the stray misdeed that no investigation could explain away. But this being granted, it remained true that giants had suffered at the hands of human visitors far more than those visitors had suffered at the hands of giants. That small and savage race, far more dangerous than dwarfs, had repeatedly hunted, captured, tortured, and murdered members of his race, often for no reason whatever, except perhaps a secret hatred of all that was larger than themselves. The outright aggressors were less reprehensible than the smiling hypocrites who, professing friendship, ingratiated themselves with their hosts in preparation for theft, capture, or murder. In all fairness he felt obliged to add that in the intercourse between the two races, human beings had occasionally shown themselves to be capable of gentleness and even kindness; but the evidence of history was, on the whole, not favorable to my dangerous race.

I had grown a little uneasy during the course of this speech, and at the end had begun to apologize, not very comfortably, for the excesses of my race, when Ekli interrupted me, and asked her brother whether it wasn't true that giants had a tendency to view all alien races with suspicion, and especially smaller races, whom they secretly envied. Heklo seemed taken aback, and said that a certain suspiciousness probably did exist, although it in no way invalidated the general picture he had drawn. He appeared faintly irritated, and the conversation soon turned to other matters. Ekli returned to her knitting. I puffed on my minuscule pipe.

It was about this time that I began to notice in Ekli a certain restlessness. At night, lying beside Morpheus in our corner in Heklo's room, I could hear through the wall how she shifted about in bed. When I woke and entered the main room I would see at once her strained face, her dark-shadowed eyes. She would seem impatient to be off, as if sitting at breakfast for one moment more were unbearable, yet when she arrived at the glade she would soon grow restless. I longed to soothe her, but I was uneasy in her presence, and preferred not to inquire too closely into her distress. Sometimes when I glanced up at her I would see her looking at me with a dark, questioning gaze. And at once I would lower my eyes.

One afternoon when the night sky was bright and clear, so that the fires burning immensely high above trembled like stars, she took me rowing on a lake, in the great forest beyond the glade. I sat on a pillow on the floor of the boat against one of the towering sides, while Ekli managed the oars, which were about twenty-five feet long. The great blades rising dangerously and plunging in the water, the clash of

oarlocks like the bang of shovels against buckets, the startling lift and drop of the floor, all this frightened me at first, so that I clung to my pillow and looked up helplessly at the high boat-sides; but as I gradually grew accustomed to the motions of the boat, a kind of cautious peacefulness came over me. From a pile of rope I climbed up onto a thwart. I kneeled there with my elbows on the gunwale and my chin in my hands and stared out over the placid black water. After a while Ekli pulled in the oars and sat on the floor of the boat beside my thwart, leaning an arm on the gunwale and resting her head on her arm. The air was summer-warm and the glimmering Morphean night sky seemed to enclose and protect us. I could see the reflection of our boat in the water and of our faces looking over the side. In the water her face turned to look at mine. Her eyelids lowered, then quickly lifted. She took a deep breath, and suddenly she burst into tears.

"What's wrong?" I cried, startled and afraid.

"I'm so happy," she said, weeping and wiping away her enormous tears, "they're happy tears," and I had the sense that something dangerous and forbidden was happening, something for which there could be no forgiveness.

5. A Word of Warning

After her outburst an awkwardness came between us. She soon took up the oars again, speaking of indifferent things. Towering over me, chattering a little too rapidly and from time to time giving a loud sniff, she seemed to me helplessly grotesque, as if her noisy sighs, her big tears, her enormous blushes, even the immensity of her embarrassment were exaggerated, parodic, and faintly preposterous. Yet at the same time I felt a tenderness toward her; and I looked away, troubled and anxious.

At supper she complained of a headache and barely touched her food. I myself felt strained, and ate with lowered eyes. Afterward I was not unhappy to see her retire to her room, leaving Morpheus and Heklo and me to our pipes. The male talk soothed me, and I had the odd sense that I'd not seen Morpheus for a long time. He and Heklo spoke of races of giants far larger than Heklo's race, while I sat snugly nestled in my corner of the chair. Heklo had never seen such creatures, whom he considered the stuff of legend, but Morpheus assured him that on inconceivably remote islands they flourished like thistles. One race of giants was so tall that, by comparison, Heklo was a gnat. Heklo laughed, said that perhaps one day he would take a voyage with Morpheus and see for himself, knocked out his pipe, and turning to

me said that since it was a pleasant night, and since he wished to have a few words with me, he wondered whether I would be good enough to accompany him on a little stroll. I glanced at Morpheus, who yawned. "Aye, lads, you two stroll, and old Morpheus shall suck his pipe, crack his knuckles, and dream of ambition by the chimney corner." Heklo had never asked me to go for a walk with him, and a nervousness came over me, though I was restless and pleased to go out.

He struck out along the familiar path to the glade, pointing to weeds and flowers along the way and asking, in his halting and formal English more heavily flavored than his sister's with Morphisms, if I had noticed that heart-shaped leaf, that five-petaled wildflower so characteristic of this part of the coast. In the glade he sat down and leaned back upon his elbows, looking up at the sky and taking deep, pleasurable breaths. I sat down far from him and waited for him to speak. After a while he took out his pipe and a pouch of tobacco, and when we had begun to smoke he said that he did not know human customs well, but among his race a certain kind of behavior on the part of a young giant with a young giantess of proper upbringing could compromise her good name. The line between friendship and the warmer feelings was not of course always easy to determine, even or perhaps especially by those who were in the act of becoming friends. Not to be tedious, he wished to know my intentions toward his sister. Before answering, I might wish to know something of the giants' view of mixed marriage. There were arguments on both sides, to be sure, but in general it was fair to say that marriages between giants and human beings were undesirable, though not impossible. Marriage between male giants and female human beings, however rare, were far more common than marriage between female giants and male human beings, although the latter was not unknown. The objections against such mixed marriages were numerous but three major ones emerged. First, no such marriage had ever issued in a child. Second, however tolerant of such unions the community of giants might be, the fact remained that mixed marriages were extremely rare, so that the couple inevitably felt isolated, odd, and set apart from the social order. Thrown together even more by their sense of isolation, such a couple often discovered that the unavoidable strains and clashes of any marriage took on an unnatural intensity, unrelieved by the commonplace round of habits and customs so helpful in a marriage of the usual kind. Third, the profound cultural, temperamental, and spiritual differences between the two races, although perhaps stimulating in the short run, nevertheless had often proved, in the long run, seriously divisive.

These were the three main objections to marriage in general

between giants and human beings, but there were three additional objections to marriage in particular between female giants and male human beings. First, a human male, however deeply attracted to a giantess, must inevitably experience a threat to his masculine nature in the presence of a creature so much more powerful than he. Second, a female giant, however deeply attracted to a human male, and perhaps in direct proportion to that attraction, was known to experience a sharp sense of ungainliness and even ugliness in the presence of a creature so much smaller and more delicate than she. Third, and this was a subject he did not care to dwell on, the extreme difference in size led to serious problems of physical intimacy. For all these reasons, he himself felt strongly that such marriages were doomed to failure and unhappiness and were in all ways inadvisable. If, however, his sister's happiness depended on it, and he could not persuade her from taking a step fraught with such risk, then he would accede to what he could not hinder, and would welcome me as his brother. He felt it was his duty to present these views openly to me, since he loved his sister deeply, since she had only recently recovered from a nearly fatal disappointment in love, and since it was clear that her affections were once again deeply engaged. He did not wish to pry into intimacies that by their very nature were private and inviolable, but he did wish to ask me to ask myself how far things had gone between me and his sister, whose welfare he valued beyond his own. If I intended to ask her hand in marriage, he urged me to consider seriously the objections he had raised, before embarking on so perilous a course; and if I did not intend to ask her hand in marriage, he must ask me, for her sake, to discontinue our private meetings, since perhaps without realizing it I was raising in her an expectation the disappointment of which could cause deep and lasting harm. He apologized if in presenting his views he had offended me in any way, but the situation was in his opinion grave, and he only regretted that in so delicate a matter he did not have all the resources of my language at his command.

Heklo's long speech produced in me at first a curious response: I felt like shaking his hand. I admired both the delicacy and respectful forth-rightness of his manner; I felt I had witnessed a superior performance, a show of high breeding. All at once I experienced a surge of rage. How dare he tell me how to behave? Even as anger rose in me I recognized its unfairness, for his sister was young, well brought up, and innocent, and it was only natural for her brother to wonder about her long absences with someone who was not only of the opposite sex but of an alien race. And for that matter, how was I behaving? I had not thought much about it, but I felt that somehow my behavior did not bear looking into. I had watched his sister fall in love with me, while my own feelings remained at best affectionate, and I

had tried not to notice any of this too closely, while enjoying the result. His words made me feel impure. I was not grateful to Heklo for making me suspicious of myself.

I told Heklo that I felt deep friendship for his sister, and had no desire to cause her harm in any way. The thought of marriage had never crossed my mind even as a remote possibility, and if the only other choice was to stop seeing her alone I would, for her sake, comply with his request, although to do so would be painful for me and might prove painful for her. I told him that I would like to see his sister alone one final time, in order to explain to her a change that would otherwise seem confusing and hurtful.

Heklo thanked me warmly and said that I was an honorable fellow whose behavior dignified my race and raised its moral stature in his eyes. He trusted me entirely. I was uneasy under the compliment, and felt that his sharp relief marked the beginning of my own troubles.

When we arrived back at the cabin, Morpheus was still sitting in his corner of the enormous chair, puffing away and speaking to Ekli, who was seated on the couch and rose anxiously as we entered. She hadn't been able to sleep; she had heard us go out. Was everything all right? Everything was fine, Heklo assured her. She took up her knitting, and Morpheus and Heklo returned to animated talk about microscopic races inhabiting waterdrops, dustmotes, firesparks, and grains of sand. From time to time Ekli looked up from her knitting and cast tender, anxious glances at me. After a while I complained of a headache and bade the company good night.

I woke feeling tired, irritable, and uneasy, and after a glum breakfast I set out as usual with Ekli along the path to the glade. Although she seemed a little strained herself, she soon fell into one of her gay, girlish moods, chattering away and stopping from time to time to pick a flower. Her girlishness, her grotesque gaiety, her oppressive tenderness, all this profoundly irritated me, as if she were deliberately pretending not to know that it was our last walk together; and I felt myself growing cool and aloof. In the glade she lay down on her stomach, resting her chin on her crossed arms and looking playfully at me while I did my best to avoid her gaze. A strain grew up between us; her gay mood darkened; she looked anxiously at me, and I had the annoyed sense that at any moment she would burst into hideous tears. She said: "Is anything—" "No, nothing," I sharply answered, "except that I have a splitting headache. I don't feel well." She at once grew tenderly solicitous and asked if there was anything she could do. I said no, no, nothing, don't worry, forget it. We did not stay long in that melancholy glade, but before we left I told her I wished to have a serious talk with her after dinner.

At dinner I stared gloomily at my hands and barely touched my

food. After dinner the four of us sat in the main room as usual. I had failed to make a clear plan and wondered irritably what was going to happen. I could feel her casting worried glances in my direction, but I puffed away forlornly on my pipe. After a while Ekli rose and said she was going for a walk. Heklo looked at her with surprise but made no objection. After she left I waited for Heklo and Morpheus to dissolve and disappear, but they sat solidly there, and suddenly standing up I said that I had a headache and wished to go for a short walk. I cast a reassuring look at Heklo, who markedly did not look at me, and quickly left.

In the glade I found her waiting for me, lying on her stomach and resting her chin on her crossed arms. I sat down beside her, cleared my throat, and did not speak. I did not know what I wanted to say. I had the intimidating sense of Heklo's fierce awareness of our meeting—as if, by a prodigious effort, he might be able to overhear us. It seemed to me that I needed complete privacy and secrecy for our final meeting. Ekli had about her an air of brave patience that filled me with nervous exasperation. I needed to think clearly. I asked her how she was feeling, and before she had a chance to answer I told her I would like to go rowing with her that very night, after everyone was asleep. She gave me a troubled, questioning gaze, but agreed with a kind of swift resignation; it was as if she had no choice. I said that I thought we should get back to the cabin, separately, at once. And with that I stood up, dusted off my robe, and hurried away.

When I returned to the cabin Heklo and Morpheus turned to me, but complaining of tiredness I said good night and went to bed. Later, when Morpheus entered, I pretended to be asleep. I heard Ekli return and exchange a few words with her brother. Heklo entered, and after a time I heard his deep, regular breathing. Slowly I sat up. As I crawled from the bed, I felt a hand grasp my arm. "Go easy, lad," whispered Morpheus, and released me. I said nothing. I crept from the room—the door was always left slightly open—and into the main room, where I laboriously climbed onto the second shelf of a high bookcase, pulled back the heavy iron bolt the size of a windowshade roller, and turned the great doorknob with both hands. I slipped out of the cabin into the woods and headed for the lake.

6. Confusion's End

I waited walking up and down by the side of the rowboat, which rose several feet above me. I wondered whether she would fail to come, but even as I wondered I heard the alarmingly loud sound of her distant footsteps. She had a strained and anxious look as she bent to set beside

the boat a flat rock and an upside-down bucket, onto each of which I climbed in turn in order to make my way over the gunwale onto the thwart. She said nothing, but shoved off and rowed out onto the peaceful black lake.

I watched the great oarblades rising and falling, and after a time she pulled in the oars and sat on the floor of the rowboat, leaning a forearm on the gunwale. In the water she looked at me and I looked away. "Ekli," I said, and it was the only word I did say; I could not utter my arranged speech. Her face changed, or seemed to change, and I had the sense that with each passing moment I was permitting a final meeting to change into a tryst. A sad, silent tryst it was: I sitting on the thwart, looking down at my knees or over the side into the water, she sitting on the floor of the boat with her head on her arm. It occurred to me that I might ask her to marry me. Why not? Heklo had said it was not unknown. We would live together in a cabin in the wood, and our ludicrous discrepancy in size would soon come to seem far less remarkable than the spiritual differences between most husbands and wives. Our physical differences, far from dividing us, would make us peculiarly sensitive to each other's needs. I would learn her language and grow familiar with the habits, customs, and history of her race. Skilled in the art of the miniature, giant craftsmen would build me a proper table, chair, desk, and bed. It seemed to me that there was something slightly wrong with this little scheme, and it struck me that I had imagined myself in my own little bed, alone. Wearily I sighed. At the sound of my sigh she turned to me and sighed. Slowly, hesitantly, she reached out an enormous finger and stroked my cheek. Her finger, though the size of my forearm, was pleasantly smooth, and I suddenly kissed it, thinking, as I did so, that perhaps I was somehow not yet betraying Heklo.

We said nothing after that. She soon took up the oars and rowed us to shore, where we walked back to the cabin in silence. Morpheus was snoring when I stepped into our curtained chamber, and for a long while I listened to Ekli turning restlessly on her bed.

I woke to the sound of voices in the main room, and when I entered I saw Heklo and Ekli seated at the table and Morpheus on the tabletop. From my chair I climbed onto the table by the stairway of books, in order to join them for breakfast, and discovered to my confusion that they were finishing supper. After supper I sat smoking gloomily in my chair-corner, while Morpheus and Heklo discussed the nature of miniature art and Ekli sat clashing away with her four-foot knitting needles. After a time Morpheus stretched, said he was feeling the need of a bit of a stroll, and asked me to join him. I was relieved to escape from that oppressive room, and with a glance at Ekli, who threw me a piercing, urgent look, I left quickly and accompanied

Morpheus on a stroll along the path leading to the glade.

In the glade he threw himself down in the grass and said: "Thou'rt troubled, lad."

I was in no mood for a lecture, and replied coldly: "Am I?"

"Aye, that thou art. 'Tis a handsome lass, and dotes on thee. Yet doth she come of good family, which is to say, she's ringed round and fenced in, and hath not that freedom of your lowborn giantess. Heklo grows restless, lad. I cannot shield thy affair much longer."

"My affair! My affair! I go walking to the glade with a female friend, and suddenly it's an affair. An affair! I suppose old Heklo will challenge me to a duel."

"Nay, lad. Yet methinks 'tis not prudent to incur the wrath of one whose knee doth look thee i' the eye. 'Sdeath, thou dost roam my realm wi' scarce a leer at lasses, and lo! thou dost meet with a giant-lass, and straightway dost vanish into the woods with her whilst her brother doth feign ignorance and fume. Think not I mind thy tuppung, lad. 'Tis that I'd not see thy neck broke by a wrathful giant."

"Tuppung! Is that what he thinks? It's madness—sheer madness. I'll tell you exactly what I've done: I've kissed her finger, once."

" 'Tis thou that are mad, if a lass doth dote on thee and thou dost no more than kiss her finger. Nay, I'd not believe it of thee. Methinks thou must be a very icicle. Tell me, lad, art afraid o' the lass? 'Tis but woman, writ large. 'Tis said these giant-lasses be most eager to do the deed, and in especial, wi' one o' thy kind, who though full-grown and full of seed, yet be ye scarce bigger than giant-babes, and therefore do affright 'em not. Old Morph doth know whereof he speaks, for time was, I roamed the giant-isles in search of pleasure. These giant-lasses proving most curious to see my wee thing, I did oblige 'em, aye, and fair poke 'em too; for they did wanton wi' me as with a sweet babe, yet one whose tiny tickler was wise beyond its years. 'Slife, and I did pleasure 'em, lad; for think not 'tis only your giant jostler can rouse a giant-lass from slumber. And after, to lie 'twixt the breasts of such an one, thy head leaning back upon the one milky hill and thy wee toesie-woesies dabbling i' the other orb—'tis a delight from which no dwarfish god nor man should abstain. Now of the pleasures granted by giant-lasses, there be many kinds; and of the first—'Sblood, what irks thee?"

"I don't want lectures in lechery. I'm thinking of marrying her."

"O weep, ye nymphs and fountains: Carl Hausman is no more. Tell me, hymeneal lad, dost love the lass?"

I stared sullenly at the ground. "I feel tenderness toward her."

"And I do feel tenderness towards my neck. Nay, I love my neck, and am married to my neck, and would not have it broke. Lad, hearken to Morpheus. Thou hast dallied long wi' the giant-lass, the

while I strove to lift her brother's mind to higher things, that he might not take notice o' thee. Thou hast compromised her, though methinks not fatally, thou hast half-witting drawn her into thy net, and thou hast endangered both thyself and me. And having done these things, thou hast not e'en ta'en thy pleasure of her, but hast held back, standing as 'twere to one side o' thyself, whistling a tune. If thou declare not thy intent to marry, then must we away, for her brother frets and fidgets; and though these giants be a peace-loving race, yet is their wrath a wonder to behold, and in especial, the wrath of a young blood eager to defend the good name o' s injured sister. Whether thou kiss the tip of her finger while reciting verses from *An Hymne of Heavenly Beautie*, or whether thou plant thy post in her potting soil, he'll wax no less wrathful in defense of her honor; and therefore saith Morpheus unto thee, an thou not marry we must away, so take thy pleasure of her ere we depart, and do that thing thou seem'st to do, ceasing these vain tormentings."

To this speech I made no reply, but sat listening to the great leaves above me; and after a while we returned in silence to the cabin.

That night I waited for Heklo to fall asleep. Rising carefully from my bed in the corner, I crept past the curtain, wondering whether Morpheus was asleep or only feigning sleep. I slipped through the open door into the main room, but stopped in perplexity before Ekli's closed door. The great knob was well above my upstretched hand. Through the door I could hear her turning restlessly on her bed. At last I began rapping quietly while whispering her name. The creaking stopped. Almost at once the door opened, as if she had been expecting me. "The glade," I whispered, and fled from her door. At the main door I climbed onto the second shelf of the bookcase, pulled back the heavy bolt, and turned the great knob with both hands. Swiftly I left the cabin and hurried along the path to the glade.

She arrived not long after, looking at me with a kind of brave apprehensiveness. She sat down, towering over me as if fearful of getting too close to me, while I paced wildly back and forth before her. She sat with her legs thrown under her and to one side, so that she leaned a little the other way, and braced herself with one hand held flat against the grass. Suddenly I strode up to her, kicked off my slippers, and began scrambling up onto her immense knees. She seemed startled, and drew herself up; I floundered in the thick rough darkness of her dress, sinking into the depression between her thighs, clinging to the coarse cloth, feeling the great legs grow tense beneath me as I crawled along the slope of her thighs. Halfway along, I looked up at her; she was gazing down at me with an expression I could not fathom. I continued clumsily forward, my knees pressing into that tense and slippery flesh, until at last I reached her lap, where with

great effort, and clutching the rough material of her dress, I pulled myself to my feet and reached up toward one high and overhanging breast, which looked as dangerous as a barrel. From my awkward position, holding to the dress with one hand and reaching up with the other, I was able to press my hand against the soft and heavy bottom of that breast. Looking down at me with terror and tenderness, she suddenly pushed herself upright, nearly throwing me from her lap, and with both hands began undoing the enormous black buttons of her bodice. She bared a breast as broad as a well; against my palm it was startlingly soft, though the nipple looked thick and ungainly, like the stub of a cigar. I saw her gazing down at me with a look of unbearable sweetness and tenderness; in that gaze my confusion ceased. "I'm going away," I suddenly said, and jumped from her lap onto the grass.

She did not move or speak, but as she looked at me it was as if a light were going out behind her eyes. I looked down, and when I looked up she jerked her eyes away and suddenly covered her breast with her dress. She held it that way, not buttoning it up, and sat very stiffly and awkwardly, as if I had entered her bedroom by mistake and had not yet apologized and taken my leave.

"Are you—would you like me to—" I miserably said, but she stared down at me with those lusterless puzzled eyes, as if she were trying to understand who I was, and after a long time I put on my slippers and walked back to the cabin.

There I waited, but she did not come. Desolation, like an illness, spread through me, and I walked back dully along the dreary path, stepping quietly as I approached the glade. She sat as before. I opened my mouth, closed it, and turned back to the cabin. From a woodpile near the door I gathered many long flat-sided sticks about half a foot thick and arranged them in a wobbly tower in order to reach the high doorknob. I carried the sticks back to the pile, entered the cabin, shut the heavy door by leaning backward against it and pushing with my feet, and returned to my bed, where I fell into a restless half-sleep.

I woke wearily to voices in the next room and wondered whether it was time for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. When I stepped into the room I was startled to see Heklo looking directly at me. Ekli was nowhere in sight. Morpheus sat smoking in a corner of the great chair. Heklo bade me good morning and announced that he and his sister were returning to town for an indefinite time. He had invited Morpheus and his friend to remain at the cabin, but Morpheus had said we must be getting on. Heklo would assist us in leaving the island. He served me breakfast. Morpheus puffed his gigantic pipe.

All this happened so swiftly that I could take in only one thing: Heklo was ridding himself of me as quickly as possible. Like his polite

speech of warning, it was an admirable performance. I could hardly say I blamed him, though I felt a little jostled by his brisk courtesies. I bolted my breakfast and waited for the next round of civility. Heklo began whisking fruit, cheese, and bread into a great sack; thrust in two great bottles of wine; added two big pipes, and a great leather bag of tobacco; tied the neck of the sack tight with a rope, as if he were strangling a criminal; and flinging the sack over his shoulder he asked Morpheus if we were ready to go. It took but a moment for me to collect my journal, and with a final glance at Ekli's closed door I set forth.

Heklo accompanied us through the wood to the shore, where I was startled to see our dwarfish boat, scarcely the length of Heklo's arm. I was relieved when he strode to a clump of bushes and drew out a rowboat of his own. This he insisted we take, arguing that it was far more seaworthy than our toy and advising each of us to work a single oar. He placed the great foodsack in the little boat and lifted both into the big boat. He seemed to ponder; then reaching into his pocket he withdrew his tinderbox and added it to the quickly opened and refastened sack. He dragged the boat down to the water and placed three rocks of ascending size beside it so that we could climb in.

When we were seated in the great rowboat, each at his twenty-five-foot oar, Heklo presented to Morpheus a brass compass the size of a kitchen clock and spoke rapidly in his language, with much pointing at the dial. After that he shook Morpheus warmly by the hand, grasping the little palm gently between thumb-tip and fingertip, and held out his finger stiffly to me, saying nothing and looking away. At once he began pushing us into the sea. The long oar was heavy and awkward, but by drawing it a few feet through the oarlock I was just able to manage. Heklo bellowed a few words to Morpheus and stood watching us with his arms crossed on his chest. We had scarcely advanced a hundred yards from shore when Heklo turned to see someone stepping through the trees. He made a motion as if to lead her away, but she stood staring out at us as we rowed into darkness. The two towering forms grew darker and darker until I could no longer tell whether they were still standing there, and I had to imagine how they turned at last and walked together into the woods.

VII. The Tale of Morpheus and Vivayne



1. *Illore*

“ ‘TWAS in my wenching days, long ere I met wi’ virtue. I had dallied many a time amongst the sea-lasses, yet more for sport than itching lust; swimming naked amongst ‘em, and causing great scandal i’ the councils o’ the grave. Yet though I swum and sported, a merry menneus, a mirthful morphlad, I would at length return to land-wenches; for there’s scant pleasure in a forkless she. Aye, and they were warned against me; and could outswim me, though a god I be. Now on a day, wench-weary, yet pleasure-starved, I did disguise me as a traveler, and return t’ the watery world, seeking out a merman in his chamber. These ancient mermen preside o’er countless generations o’ seamaids, who pass on t’ the common pools, as younger lasses come to take their place. Now though he detested Morpheus—for ‘twas a puritanical old sardine—yet so cunningly did I feign to be a traveler fro’ thy realm, disguising my face and voice, as he was well deceived; and sliding by degrees into his company, and thence into his confidence, I worked my design so well that in short space I was his trusted friend and helper, lodged in his very chamber. I did profess great interest in his race, and did swear to devote myself wholly to his service; and all to one end, that I in secret might corrupt a mermaid, teaching her the ways o’ forked pleasure.

“Wrinkle not thy mortal brow at me, an thou wouldst hear my tale.

“Now each chamber hath his chief mermaid, who doth instruct and rule the younger maids; and these older lasses be full-formed, and ripe for pleasure. I’ that time was the chief mermaid called Wore. I’ll not weary thee wi’ recounting o’ my love-progress; suffice to say, that scarce five wakings were come and gone, ere I and she had passed from eye-fondlings to furious clipping o’ nights, when all the mermaid world did snore. Yet could I not rest content m boyish clips and kisses, but would have the plunging pleasure too; and soon o’ermastering her

mermaidly revulsion, I taught her to ape the ways o' forked love, showing her tricks the which did so enflame and madden me as to make true-forked love seem by comparison tame. Yet methinks 'twas not that, did so much fever me, as knowing she was unpossessed. Howe'er it may be, on a night we were espied by two prying maids; who though they reported us not, yet were our meetings made so precarious by this discovery, as to remove all peace and contentment from that time forth. For it being accounted a grave crime for mermaid or merlad to touch i' the way of love, ere they enter the common pools, so for a chief mermaid 'tis a loathsome and heinous offense, wherefore she is stripped of her pow'rs, and banished from out the mermaid realm. Yet so tight knit were we in desire, as to desire naught in all the world save mutual desire.

"So on a night did Illore flee wi' me secretly away, forsaking the chambers of her girlhood for distant pools unknown. Side by side we swum through dim-lit chambers, and e'en as we glided we clipped and kissed; and our wet limbs did slipp'rily intertwine i' the lubricious water. Through many far chambers we swum, till coming t' the outermost chambers o' the school, which chambers be desolate and unlived-in, and serve but as boundary t' the chambers o' the school beyond, we did pass into a broad waterway; and taking this path, we came to a wide lake, wherein were many mermen and maids. 'Twas one o' the great common pools, whereto mermaids of her school did pass. Yet not content to" be so near her fled chamber, Illore did lead me across the water to a still broader lake, having the look of an unbounded sea. Now in that water were many islands; and on those islands, and in the water round about, mermen and mermaids did disport themselves. And swimming a great way out, to where scarce any of her kind did come, she led me to a rocky isle; and there leaving me for a time, she plunged below. For know, when the fishy kind go t' the common pools, there they seek out an inner chamber, which chamber is theirs alone; and there do they dwell all solitary, though mingling i' the outer waters wi' their kind. Illore soon rising, did lead me down t' the chamber below or within; and there we lived, she and I, in mutual love-fever, our passion growing ever stronger.

"For though I was but a wanton, and out for pleasure, yet did the slipp'ry wench so enflame me as to make me feel thrall to her. 'Twas not her lusty upper half alone did take me, though she was all Venus above; but that slipp'ry slith'ry nether part itself did fill my long-dulled senses wi' sharp delight. And though I oft dreamed o' forests thick-tangled, dark underwoods, and mossy grots, yet did the waking absence fever me more; and I knew not, and little recked, whether 'twas that absence or that slipp'ry presence did fill me wi' such lust as I had scarce known in all the days o' my wantonness. She for her part

did pleasure me skillfully and well, and did so far o'ercome repugnance as to learn a kissing trick not taught in mermaid lore; yet could she ne'er master a faint distaste for my dark netherworld, and though lusty and unashamed, fain would have kept to upper wantonness. I for her sake did cover my lower parts wi' woven vines; whereat she being pleased, did weave me a cunning cloak from waist to foot, which Morph-masking vestment she o'er-daubed wi' slipp'ry stuff. Nay, more: she did at length fashion a tail to cover my feet, beseeching me to move about i' the sliding manner of her race. So habited like a merman, a very seamorph, I in my fish-trousers did slither about the rocks, and swim i' the pool, and leave off walking: growing half merman for her sake.

"Yet, 'twas for my lust's sake too: for seeing me appareled thus, she was more readier to o'ercome repugnance, doing all my bidding i' the maid-melting seed-scattering dark.

"Now though I lived but to pleasure me wi' the fair Illore, think not I dwelt still within my strait love-chamber; for though love-pleasure doth arise and grow in covert wise, yet will it show itself abroad. She, though jealous and suspicious, and full o' fears, yet would be seen wi' me; for though they live solitary, yet 'tis a sociable race. Aye, and mayhap she feared, being half woman, how that her sweet Mermeus might grow restless, shut up within. So did we leave our unchaste chamber, appearing above the rocky isle, or swimming about together i' the nearby water. Oft did I see other maids and lads round about, alone or in loving pairs, who though they approached us not, yet did they not flee from us, nor shun us in hostile wise; and though from lecherous habit I cast wanton looks upon this and that watery lass, yet in truth had I no eyes but for Illore. And she seeing it was so, did seem to glow and shine in love-triumph; and I was afire wi' longing, seeing her so. In time we roamed farther abroad, and I did see strange wonders o' the realm: as great rocky isles, all hollowed and pillared within, and filled wi' books and burning lamps—these being watery libraries, beloved of that reading race. Yet was it sweet to return to our solitary chamber, after roaming far abroad; and oft stayed we shut up there, forgetting all the world, and sick wi' desire. Ne'er in all my dallying days had I been so constant, lad; and I did marvel at the fire in me, that burned still at the sight of Illore.

2. The Solitary Maid

"Now on a day, swimming with Illore to a craggy isle not far distant, I did spy i' the waters round about, a maid not seen before. She did stare—and blushing look away—and stare again—and plunge below;

for like unto all her race, she did know me for an alien. I and Illore, deep-drunk wi' desire, smiled one at th'other knowingly, for 'twas a type o' maid we'd spake of many a time. For look thee, Carl, there be seamaiads who passing fro' their school t' the common pools, do cling t' their girlish and virginal ways: avoiding merlads, studying philosophy, and living untouched by men: and these creatures be i' the mermaid tongue mockingly called 'old girls/ Living thus unnaturally apart, they be subject to strange exaltations, feverish visions, and sudden desolations o' spirit; for living too much i' the mind, so are they punished by the mind's caprices. 'Tis said thou canst tell 'em by their shyness, their thin cheeks, and their unnaturally bright eyes. Such an one was this startled maid. Nay, worse, 'twas that rare and laughable thing, a mermaid wi' scarce any breasts. So dived she down, and we did smile, we two: and laughing wi' desire, we did slith'rily interlace our lusty limbs i' the water.

"So returned we to bur chamber and there did love long and hard, till weary wi' love's labor we fell asleep.

"I know not what womanish whim led Illore to befriend the solitary maid. Mayhap she hungered secretly for companionship with her kind, she being by nature sociable; and jealously keeping rival maids away, here found a lass could cause her no fear. 'Tis not impossible, she did feel a kinship wi' the maid, forwhy they both lived apart; or say, her love-happiness needs must have a witness. Yet methinks there was some darker cause: for being so wholly devote unto me, and living solely for love, may she not ha' been secretly stung by the sight of a manless maid, feeling as 'twere reproached? 'Sdeath, though I be Morpheus immortal, yet can I not unravel the heart of a woman, though she be half fish. Howe'er it may be, Illore did take an interest i' the maid; and seeming at first to pity her, did soon form a friendship. I feeling encumbered by the lass, did heartily wish her t' the devil; for in her presence Illore would not be kissed nor love-fondled. Nay, worse, a constraint did seem to come o'er her, caught as 'twere by infection fro' the maid: for Vivayne knew not how to jest, and tease, and wanton with her eyes, but all was in earnest with her; and covered wi' confusion, she would lower her lashes. Then did a constraint come o'er merry Morpheus, for I did feel coarse and crude; so was I angered at the maid, for making me feel a lecher. Yet together did the twain seem free, and far fro' me would laugh at their hearts' ease. And I did feel a jealousy steal o'er me, to see them so.

"Think not I desired Vivayne. 'Sblood, 'twas a maid too thin and delicate by half. Why, by the side o' the robust Illore she was in all ways dimmed and diminished, and seemed scarce grown into womanhood. And mayhap Illore, feeling the sweet comparison, did like to be seen beside her; for whereas she was all ripeness, roundness,

and flash o' the eye, Vivayne was sharpness and edges and looking away. Yet did she have a girlish prettiness; her eyes gray and long, her neck delicate as a chickenbone; and at the back o' that neck, when she bent down her head, the tip of her spine showed through. 'Sdeath, seeing that neck, methought how that a lusty embrace would crack her bones; and turning to Illore, who had the powerful neck of a goddess, I longed to make lusty love.

"I marked another difference, which was this: Illore having frank eyes, did look me full i' the face; yet Vivayne, e'en after the loss of her first shyness, would listen wi' downcast eyes, or look askance. Why, beside the ripe Illore she seemed a shy daughter, or a little sister; aye, a little sister. We have a little sister who hath no breasts: what shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for? For Illore was the rose o' Sharon, and lily o' the valley; and her breasts were as clusters o' the vine.

"Nay, I coveted not the little sister. Yet for all that, methinks 'twas mistaken of Illore to show herself together wi' the maid. For though I desired not Vivayne, having no eyes but for Illore, yet wi' those eyes could I not but mark, how that Illore's unrivaled neck did betray as 'twere a thickness or grossness i' comparison wi' the dainty and undesired neck o' the too-delicate lass; and if Vivayne seemed but a shy daughter beside Illore, yet ere this had I ne'er been taught to see a mother in my ripe mistress.

"The friendship 'twixt Illore and Vivayne was scarce begun, ere 'twas broke off by the maid. Vivayne on a day not appearing i' the waters round about our isle, Illore did fear some harm had come to her; and visiting her alone in her chamber, she did report back, how that her friend seemed changed towards her. Fro' that time forth Vivayne was seen no more. And Illore going to seek her a second time in her chamber, Vivayne did say to her, how that she must be alone forever more, and ne'er see her friend; looking at Illore all sorrowfully, as she would ask forgiveness.

"Then did I curse Vivayne t' the devil, saying how Illore was well rid of such an one as that; yet was Illore sore-troubled at her friend's dark change, blaming not the maid but herself. For she did say, how that Vivayne was innocent and pure; and she but coarse and crude. Then did I strive to cover her wi' kisses, yet she pulled away. So was I wroth, and cursed again the maid, calling her all manner o' vile names. Yet Illore growing sorrowful, the tears did run down; and she did say, fro' this time forth she had no friend in all the world. And deep-pained at her words I did cry out: Am I not thy friend? Dost cast me out? And gazing all sorrowfully at me she did say: Oh Morpheus my love, though I do love thee, yet art thou not my friend. So was I smote i' the heart, hearing her speak those words. Then did I say no more o'

Vivayne, but lay me down in sorrow.

"And I did think, how that Illore had left her home by stealth, and fled wi' me away into the common pools, leaving behind her friends, her life, her girlish ways, and all for love of me; yet did she feel me not her friend. And looking into my dark, inconstant heart, I asked me, whether 'twas so indeed; and I drew back my gaze, liking not what I saw therein.

"And I seeing how Illore did know, I loved her not, but was bound to her in deep desire only: and thinking how she had fled wi' me away, knowing in her heart I loved her not, yet all for love of me: so did a pity come stealing o'er me, and my heart was moved for Illore. Then was I sorrowful, knowing I loved her not.

"So did Vivayne cast a shadow 'twixt Illore and me.

3. A Demon in the Dark

"We returned to our former ways, for I was deep-bound to Illore by fiery chains o' desire; and Vivayne was soon buried, though not forgot. The flame of our passion burned more fiery-hot than before; yet 'twas as if the flame were blown upon, to make him burn the more, and burned not of his sole self alone. Oft I would wake i' the night and look upon the sleeping Illore, whose long eyes closed in sleep were fairer far than those other eyes; and I did curse those other eyes, that they had looked on these. For Illore's were dark and knowing eyes, that had looked long and deep in my lusting gaze, taking a tint of darkness from mine own; and I did wonder, whether her eyes were coarsened by long dalliance wi' mine. Then would I look upon her hair, so lustrous, rich, and dark, as I could scarce keep from thrusting my hand therein; unlike that other hair, straw-colored and straight-hanging. And gazing upon the ripe, warm throat of Illore, I did think it fitter far for pleasure than that slender throat, which to imagined touch seemed ivory cool.

"So did Vivayne lie with us, like a demon i' the dark.

"Now on a night, waking on a sudden, I did feel Illore gripping my shoulder, and see her looking at me wi' troubled eyes, saying, Wake, Morpheus, thou hast had a dream. Why no, said I, I had no dream, thou art mistaken. Oh Morpheus, said she, thou didst cry out in thy sleep. Nay, said I, is it so? Oh Morpheus my love, thou didst cry out: Vivayne.

"Then was I frightened, that I had cried out her name unawares. "What, thought I, am I possessed of a witch, that I cry out thus in my sleep? And I cursed her for a demon, and cast her out of my thoughts; yet looking at Illore, I did think on Vivayne.

"Now on a night, waking again, I saw Illore gazing sorrowfully upon me. What, said I, did I cry out again? Nay, said she in heavy sadness. Why then dost gaze at me so melancholical? Oh Morpheus my love, thou art in love with Vivayne.

"And I laughed aloud to hear her say so, and cursed Vivayne for a gray-eyed witch o' the lake; yet in my heart I knew 'twas so. Then did I hang down my head in heart-sorrow, for I liked not to love Vivayne; yet was the hook deep-sunk in my heart.

"And Illore, knowing I loved Vivayne, was tender to me, like a sister; and I lay i' the chamber and would not stir, for I was sick with love.

"Yet did I hate my love, and would not yield to it; longing for it to pass away.

"Illore seeing me stricken wi' disease of love, wherefrom I languished and did pine away, did tend me in my illness. So wounded was I by wasting love, as I could scarce eat, or lift my head; wherefore she did sustain me wi' black herbs fetched fro' the lake floor, and boiled in pots. She laid cool cloths on my fevered brow, and kept watch anxiously o'er me i' the night; yet did my fever burn ever deeper. For I was consumed wi' the gray-eyed maid, who turning to fire within me did burn away in brain and blood, leaving all desolate and waste within. Then did I yearn to be mortal-born, that I might die and have done. And seeing me weaken and grow pale, and knowing there was but one medicine for my hurt, Illore at last despairing did say, she would seek Vivayne, and implore her to come to me. I hearing these words as in a feverish dream scarce knew what answer to make, and turned my head away; yet I stayed her not.

"Illore was long while absent, whereat my fevered fancy flamed near to madness; for though I was sick wi' longing for Vivayne, yet did I so hate the fire that wasted me, as wellnigh to hate her for love of whom I sickened away. Illore at length returning, I looked wildly about, yet was she alone; and gazing on me wi' sorrowing eyes, she said how that Vivayne, at first refusing to admit her, yet i' the end relenting, did listen sorrowfully t' the tale o' me, saying when 'twas done that she did refuse to see me ever; nay, that she would sooner burn out her eyes wi' fiery sticks than look on me again; and gazing fervently into the eyes of Illore, she did say, how she had gone away forwhy she'd had divination o' this unholy love, hoping by absence to escape an unwished passion, and injury to her friend. And if e'er I should make trial o' seeing her, she would go away forever; and if e'er I should come near her, she would set herself on fire, and gladly die.

"Now at the sound o' these words a fear came o'er me, for I did feel blasted and burned, and doomed to an immortality of unquenched desire; yet e'en so the passion of her fiery denial enflamed me like

words of love.

"For I did love Vivayne wi' so baleful a love, that hearing she spake of me, albeit in hard and hating wise, did make my love-heaved heart nigh crack my ribs wi' beating: for I was as one who had drunk poison of love, yet could not die.

"Then did I long to be soothed with hearing of her name, and listening to tales of how she lived, there in her cold and love-denying chamber: yet did hearing tell of her but fever me more.

"Now strange to say I could scarce recall the looks o' the lass that fevered me so: for I had scarce ta'en note of her, save in derision, for why she was not Illore. Her long gray eyes, which ne'er had looked direct into mine, and her slender neck, seemed scarce more than little pictures in a book, summoning t' the mind's eye images clear-outlined yet general in nature: as the Old Man, the Young Maid, Sorrow. So did she seem to escape my fancy, ungrasped e'en there. Yet did this same uncertain seeing lend as 'twere a restless enchantment to her, as she were made of ghostly stuff; and this same dazzling dimness did throw into sharp relief the syllables of her name. And in my brain there sounded unceasing two notes of a dark and doleful song: Vivayne, Vivayne, Vivayne.

"So I knew not what to do, there in my chamber.

"And being love-damned, and half out o' my wits, I was all the while faithfully tended by the sorrowing Illore; who though she looked pale, and unwell, yet did I scarce take note of it.

"And as I lay weak in body and will, roasting in love's fierce flame, and slow-turning on his spit, I 'gan to reason thus. When thou didst see Vivayne, thou loved'st her not, nor liked not her looks; yet she being absent, thou dost straightway droop and pine. 'Tis absence thus hath caused thy present pain; for thy sick fancy feeding on absent forms, doth build ghost-Vivaynes to haunt thy restless rest. So doth her fancied face, exceeding far in fairness her seen face, slow draw thee to thy doom.

Now this being so, 'tis clear thy cure doth lie in seeing, though but for a moment, that undelightful face. For when thou didst look upon her, thou loved'st her not.

"Now darkly I knew this was but love-logic, to draw me to Vivayne; yet such was my state as I did easily persuade me, that to see her was straightway to be cured. So with this thought I began a little to revive; till by and by, though much weakened still, I had strength enough for the short voyage.

"And taking leave o' the sorrowing Illore, who methought looked unhealthy pale, I did vow to return posthaste, after taking the air for my health's sake; both knowing I was bound for Vivayne.

"Now though I be a fair swimmer, yet was I so much weakened

fro' my long enchamberment, as I needs must rest me on mine own rock isle when I rose gasping fro' the lake; and there lying on the rocks, cumbered wi' my false tail, I did see far off i' the dark the ghostly shape o' the isle o' gray-eyed Vivayne.

"Then did I fetch such a sigh as would crack the heart of a stone; and plunging into the lake I did swim fiercely, yet wi' great tiredness, to the isle o' Vivayne. And as I drew closer my heart beat hard in my breast; for I did fear, lest seeing me she should forever vanish away.

"I knew not what was best to do; but arrived at the isle, I hid me serpentlike among the rocks, hoping to catch sight o' the fiery form that burned in me. So for a long and weary while I lay hidden.

"And seeing naught, I did debate wi' myself, whether to go within or no. I did say to myself, that she must be either within, or else without. Now were she without, methought 'twere best to go within, else might she spy me on the rocks, and flee away. Yet say she were within: was't not more prudent to stay without? Twice nay. For were she there within, so must she either sleep or wake. Now say she slept, then might I spy on her. Yet say she were awake, then could I plead with her, and beg mercy, vowing chaste friendship if I might but look on her: and she being pure of heart, would be moved though she were made of marble. So debating, I did by slow degrees convince me, how I must go within.

"Then did I slip all silent into the water, and diving deep down, did find an entrance so strait as I could scarce make my way through: and gashing my chest on the sharp rock, I struggled bleeding in, and swum up toward the inner chamber.

"Now though I had strength enow for such watery feats—for a god's a god, lad, take him for all in all—yet was my weakness such, as rising t' the surface I needs must suck in a fiery sharp breath. There on a rock before me I beheld through water-streaming eyes the maid Vivayne. Who opening wide her eyes wi' fearful amaze, did let fall a book from her grasp: and thirled and transfixed by that beauteous sad gaze, wherein methought I saw the secret of all oceans, I could utter no word, nor make motion to follow, as from her rock the cruel seamaid plunged into the water beside me and was gone. Through eyes astream and still half-blinded I but dim-saw the fair form dart fro' the rock; and on my chest I felt or fancied the flick of her Morpheus-murdering tail. Vivayne! I cried; and echo answered: vain, vain, vain . . . 'Twas useless to pursue, yet plunging after, and wounding myself yet again i' the narrow opening, I rose above, wild-crying: Vivayne! Vivayne! Yet all about was desolate and still. Then groaning aloud, and smiting my fist upon a rock, I did curse those eyes, and my fiery fate: vowing to await her return, and seize her, and make her mine by force: and soothed by my rage, I did in time return to her chamber,

there to await Vivayne o' the gray eyes.

"So like a thief I lurked in the chamber o' Vivayne. Chambers, T sooth: for the irregular growth o' rock did form two irregular pools, close-joined by a narrow passage. I had entered the larger chamber, which rocky room was supplied wi' some rough shelves whereon stood books, not many, in neat array. Upon a flat rock there did lie writing instruments and a burning lamp; here and there I spied a few simple possessions, as a small ivory box, a curved comb, a mirror, and a length o' vine-rope. The second chamber seemed bare, save for rocks about a pool; in one corner I discovered kegs o' vine-meal, and traces of a fire.

"Then returning t' the first chamber, I tremblingly took up the book she had dropped, which raising to my face, I drank down its odor: and laying me down on the rock where she had lain, I pressed my fevered face against the cold, deserted stone.

"So began my life i' the chamber o' Vivayne. I'll not linger o'er it now, having too-long-lingered then. I well knew how to gather vines and herbs fro' the rich-growing slopes below, and how t' express juices fro' the vines, and cook vine-meal into cakes; aye, old Morpheus was half a merman, and my needs but scant. And though I did live in unceasing expectation of her soon return, yet in my heart did I know she was gone clean away. Yet did I linger in her chamber, and this for three reasons. And the first was this, that lacking Vivayne, I possessed at least her chamber. And the second was this, that a sort of hopeless hope of her return did keep me bound there. And the third was this, that I was deep-pained at the thought o' the sorrowing Illore; and so I hid me from her, there i' the chamber o' Vivayne.

"Now on a day, pent in my prison, I did hear sounds of lamentation, muffled and far away. I greatly wondered at the sound; and as I lay listening my blood seemed to grow cold within me. And pressing my ears shut till my fingers ached with it, I did drive out the sound; yet did I seem to hear it still, like as it came fro' within, and were the sound o' mine own foreboding. So after a time I did leave my chamber, and emerge without: and there i' the distance I did see a train o' seamaiids, passing in solemn slowness wi' raised torches, and pouring forth doleful song. Then did I feel that song dolefully flowing through the veins o' me. And coming to within close sight of em', I saw that they bore a great litter whereon was a raised couch or bed; and thereon lay Illore. Then all trembling I enquired of a watching maid, what that sight portended: and she did say, 'twas a sad tale, for 'twas said how the maid had pined away for grief: and in her hand was discovered a paper, whereon was writ: Here lieth Illore, who died for love.

"Then was my heart sore, and a dying seemed to come o'er me; yet

I wept not.

"Now when the mourning was done, they carried Illore under the water, as is their custom, and buried her in a stone coffin, deep i' the lake bottom. And returning to the chamber of Illore, there did I stare upon the place and stage of my most fiercest passion; yet was all quiet as a tomb. And liking not the place, I did take me far from thence, yet not t' the chamber o' Vivayne; for there was that within me did bar me henceforth from that door. So did Mores passing free me fro' my prison, though not fro' mine inward chains. And going to a solitary isle far out i' the lake, there I did live alone for many a day, thinking on Illore and Vivayne, Vivayne and Illore; till the twain mingling as one in my mind, 'twas as if all loveliness had fled fro' the world, and naught left but sorrow.

"Then at last I did leave that accursed place, swimming from isle to isle, and passing into strange corners o' the mermaid realm, where great hissing serpents curled about me as I swum. So after many trials and hardships, on a day I came to dry land. And having lived so long a merman, I could not walk upon the land; but dragged me like a wounded lion along the ground. Then was I set upon by great winged creatures wi' fiery eyes, and beaks o' brass, who did swoop down and seek to tear out mine eyes; yet did I fight 'em off wi' stones, and drag my way t' the shelter of a shallow cave. And slow recovering my strength, I did at long last make my way home to my hall, forswearing forever more a watery life. And though I sought not Vivayne o' the gray eyes, yet did I not cease thinking on her; for though she abhorred me, yet she had her hook in my heart, I know not how—I know not how. Aye, 'tis there still, and doth ache in foul weather. Aye, curse thee, thou gray-eyed witch o' the lake, who did take me from Illore. I did learn in time, how she had fled to Upper Ocean, and there did make her home, serving as ward to mermaid young, deep i' the hollow o' the mating mountain. So is she fled, and Illore long cold. So they all pass, leaving naught behind save eternity of grief. Heigh ho, old Morph's aweary now. Thinking on those twain hath hurt me about the heart. Farewell."

With these words he drew himself down, and closing his melancholy eyes he slept, or seemed to sleep.

VIII. The Tale of the City in the Sea



1. *A Second Jonah*

WE had not gone far—scarcely half an hour by my watch—when we were struck by a heavy wind and lashing rain, which nearly swamped us and threatened to topple our fragile boat. In the wind-maddened rain I sheltered my journal beneath my robe, closing the lapels over it and hugging it to my chest. “Let’s go back!” I shouted to Morpheus, who grimly worked the oars, bending far back and shaking water from his face. Water poured from the brim of his derby as from a roof-gutter. “ ‘Sblood, am I a god? Am I Morpheus? I’d sooner drown i’ the bosom o’ the vasty deep!”

“Careful, Morph!”

We plunged into a trough, as if we had fallen over a cliff, but a moment later rose high on a wave-crest.

“Ho, lad! Man the topgallant! Back is it? Back? We’re south-northeast o’ back! And I without my galoshes!”

“Can’t we—but what’s that? Land ho! Over there!”

In a flash of lightning I had seen a dark island, off the larboard side.

“ ‘Tis an isle I know not! Wouldst make for shore?”

“Anywhere out of this storm!”

Morpheus gripped the oars and headed for the unknown shore. The rowing was not strenuous, for the wind drove us directly toward the island. We appeared to be approaching it with remarkable speed; already I could see its dim smooth outline in the dark and rain. Despite the helping wind, the swiftness of our approach puzzled me, until it struck me that the storm-lashed isle was itself moving toward us.

“It’s coming at us, Morph! Turn back! Back!”

Morpheus looked over his shoulder at the dark island, but instead of changing direction he drew the oars quickly in.

“What’s wrong?” I cried.

“Down, lad! On the floor o’ the boat, I say! Cling t’ the thwart and fear not! ‘Tis no isle, but one that knows Morpheus well!”

As it came rushing closer I saw that it was a great whale, which

already had opened its jaws; and before I could think to leap into the sea, I felt our boat sweeping helplessly into the engulfing maw. We came in on the crest of a great wave. Seated on the floor of the boat I clung desperately to the thwart—fearfully I looked up at a dark ledge of jaw just above my head—then we came rushing down and began turning round and round in a black maelstrom. I felt us break suddenly free and go sweeping into a tunnel, carried by a great burst of water that dashed over the sides of the boat. Half-sinking in the roaring stream, we rushed through blackness till we came to a narrow opening, and passed all at once into a large and quiet pool.

Morpheus was still rowing. Water dripped from his hatbrim and ran from the tip of his nose. Our boat was half-filled with water and rode dangerously low, but Morpheus continued to pull at the oars, stretching out his legs in water up to the knees. I now saw that we were headed for a dark mass that rose up in the pool; and as we drew near I made out a great four-poster bed, floating on a platform partially sunk in the water.

Morpheus bumped into the submerged stairs of the platform and climbed out of the boat, sinking up to his knees as he stood on a sunken step. He removed his derby with one hand, shook water from it, and offered me his other hand as I climbed out after him. He replaced the hat on his head. We dragged the boat up the steps, tipping it to get rid of the water, and beached it on the platform. I removed my journal from my robe; the covers were wet but the pages seemed unharmed. Together we lifted out our two soaked sacks and wedged them between the boat and the curtained bedside. From one sack I removed a piece of soggy cheese, and from the other Morpheus removed a wet box of tobacco. Ripples from the pool slapped against the upper step and spilled lightly against the wet platform as, our slippers making loud spongy noises, we strode toward the division of the curtains.

2. Going Under

I clutched my dripping slippers between thumb and forefinger and stepped in soaked socks onto the sagging bedfloor. Morpheus lit an oil lamp and held it aloft, swinging shadows around the chamber. The bed was about half the size of the great bed in the Hall of Morpheus. On the black spread stood a scattering of old armchairs and couches, and in one corner I saw a pile of driftwood. One of the long curtains showed Jonah in the belly of the whale, in the center of an apple-green ocean. Morpheus looked about with an air of satisfaction and strode heavily to a nearby couch, where he lifted up a black robe that lay

flung over the back. " 'Twill keep thee fro' the sniffles, lad," he remarked, and tossed it to me.

"You're soaked yourself, Morph."

" 'Twill dry out, ere eternity doth pass. Y the meantime, 'tis a pleasurable change fro' the tedium of dryness."

He strode dripping to the head of the bed, where setting the lamp on a bookshelf and the box of tobacco on the bedspread he began to examine his books. As I came up to him I saw that here and there on the shelves sat kegs of wine, their spigots protruding. He rapped several kegs with his knuckles, said "Ah," thrust a wooden cup under a spigot, and turned the cock. A stream of red wine splashed loudly into the cup. He cut off the stream, took a deep drink, and smacked his lips thoughtfully.

" 'Tis mellow, lad; mellow." Finishing off the cup, he rilled it again and handed it to me. Then he searched among his pillows for another cup, filled it quickly, and sat down on the spread against the pillows with a loud contented sigh.

I set my cup on a shelf and laid my slippers on the spread to dry. Removing my journal from my wet robe, I began wiping the covers on the dry robe. The pages were undamaged, except for a slight wetness at the edges. When the covers were as dry as I could make them, I placed the journal on the spread. I removed my soaked robe and draped it over the back of a chair. I took off my wet shirt, my wet pants, my wet socks, and my wet watch, arranging them neatly about my journal. With the pillowcase I dried my body, my face, and my dripping hair. Then I wrapped myself tightly in the dry, heavy robe. In one of the pockets I found a short pipe, crusted with old tobacco; and taking my cup of wine from the shelf, I stretched out on a nearby couch. I could feel the bedchamber swaying on the water. Overhead I saw a canopy painted with many small figures.

"Praised be the Lord: 'tis dry," said Morpheus, who had opened the tobacco box. From his robe-pocket he removed and carefully dried his short black pipe. We filled our pipes and lit them with one of the wooden matches that Morpheus produced from under his pillow. Leaning back on the couch I puffed in silence, gazing up at the canopy.

"Who are those figures up there, Morph? The green background must mean they're under water, and I see an octopus over there, and some unlikely fish swimming about. But who are they, exactly?"

"Why, canst not tell? They be those that have lived i' the sea. There's white-bearded Nereus, whom some do call Old Man o' the Sea, and those be his fifty daughters round about him. Of them is Thetis the most far-famed, she who did wed the mortal Peleus and mother forth Achilles. There thou dost see her as she guides the Argo past the Wand'ring Rocks. There see'st thou Proteus, him whom the

sea-loving singer of Dublin doth call shape-shifter, and there's old Poseidon, driving his two-horse chariot through the waves. There's fair Amphitrite, his bride, and wave-mastering Triton, their son, of whom sweet Ovid saith, he doth calm the sea by blowing through's conch-shell horn. Yet doth Pausanius report, there be many Tritons, which be sea monsters; and one that he espied at Rome had hair on's head like the hair o' marsh-frogs, and a man's nose withal, and a body scaled like unto a shark's, and a dolphin's tail, yet hands with fingers and fingernails; and's eyes were blue. There's Glaucus the fisherman, who on a day did dive into the sea, and lo! his legs did grow into a fish's tail. See there, woeful Florimel, her whom lustful Proteus, in honey-flowing Spenser's tale, doth rescue from a lecherous fisherman, and bring to's bower at the bottom o' the sea. There's Undine the fair water-sprite, who loving Huldbrand doth gain a human soul; yet i' the end must she return t' the watery element. See there, the Neckan's wife, weeping alone in the sea-halls beneath the salt sea-tide. Behold Margaret, on her throne of red gold i' the heart o' the sea, ere she foresook her merman for the little gray church on the shore. There's the Lady o' the Lake, whom by courtesy I do admit to this watery company, forwhy with her knights and damsels she did dwell in a lake, which is but a little sea. And lo, the babe Lancelot is there, whom she did nurture to manhood in that watery home. There's old Gepetto, who lived two years i' the belly of a dogfish, till on a day he met there his Pinocchio. And see there, lad, 'tis Captain Nemo; and there's the white whale thy Melville sang. And behold: is't not old Morpheus himself, asleep in's bed i' the belly of a whale? Aye, these be some o' the sea-dwellers, ranged above thy head; for those who live i' the sea be kin to dreamers."

"Aye, Morph; yet 'tis to be hoped I'm more Jonah than Nereus, for methinks I'd not live i' the sea forever, but come as a visitor, and depart — aye, soon depart."

"Why, art uncomfortable, lad? Dost find it cold, and wet, here i' the ocean?"

"Nay, Morph, I meant not to complain. Yet methinks 'tis an uncertain and dangerous harbor, here i' the belly of a whale."

"Thou'rt much mistaken, lad: 'tis uncertain, and dreadful dangerous, outside the belly o' the whale; but here within 'tis safe as a church."

"A floating church. Nay, worse: a floating pew within a floating church."

"Then praised be the Lord, who hath wrought such wonders; for look thee, the Nazarene did but walk upon the water, but Carl Hausman doth sit and smoke upon it."

"Well, Morph, as you might put it: 'tis a manner o' rowing much

to my liking. Wait a minute. What now?"

The floor had tipped to one side, flinging down books from the shelves. Beyond the curtains I heard a sharp slap of water.

" 'Tis the declination, lad; which is to say, the cadence, drop, or deep down-going. Hold on to thy hat."

"You're the one with the hat."

"Indeed I am, lad. Indeed I am. Why, I had clean forgot."

Pulling his hat far forward so that the brim covered his eyebrows, he clapped a hand on top of it as he puffed away.

"The whale's going under? Aye, Morph, I can feel it in my belly. You look preposterous. Wake me when it's over."

Wearily I laid an arm across my eyes.

"We've scarce time to finish a pipe of tobacco, lad; 'tis a swift plunge, though far."

I felt a hand on my shoulder, and looked up to see Morpheus gazing down at me. " 'Tis time, lad. Come."

"Already? I think I must have fallen asleep. It feels strange, for a second I thought we were back in the bed . . . the other one . . ."

"Come." Holding a lantern in one hand, and adjusting his hat, he strode to the curtains and awaited me impatiently. I rose, picked up my wet socks, and looked at them doubtfully.

"Thou hast no need of 'em, lad. Make haste." Tying my new robe tightly about me, and picking up my wet slippers, I made my way across the bed and followed Morpheus through the curtains onto the floating platform. He walked straight to the rowboat, pushed it into the water, and stepped in, beckoning. I entered the wet boat clumsily, placing my slippers in my lap and resting my bare feet in ankle-deep water. At once Morpheus began rowing away. In the dim light of the lantern I saw glistening dark walls stretching high overhead into blackness. We passed a floating barrel, part of an oar, clumps of seaweed, and a dead black fish. Morpheus rowed into a dark tunnel, and after a time we entered a great cavern with dark-red walls.

The water was shallow, little deeper than the length of an oarblade, and here and there wet islands rose up. Morpheus informed me that we were in the mouth of Leviathan, and I looked with interest at the great white tooth-boulders that lined the immense cavern. Morpheus rowed in and out among the soft, fleshy islands to the front of the mouth. In the lantern-light I saw the row of high teeth rising over us, disappearing into hollows in the toothless upper jaw. There were boat-wide spaces between the teeth. The water was so shallow at the base of the teeth that Morpheus stopped a few feet away. Reaching out an oar, he rapped a tooth; the knock resounded in the great cavern. He gazed up as if estimating the height of the upper jaw, then with a sigh began rowing back. In midpool he stopped, drew in the oars, and

rearranged his hat. Reaching into the pocket of his wet robe, he took out a pipe and match; and scraping the match several times against the boat-side, he managed to strike a light, and lit his pipe.

"Now keep firm fixed in thy remembrance, lad, that after the tempest cometh the calm." He removed the pipe and blew two thick, slow-swirling smoke rings. He replaced the pipe in his mouth and, lifting an oar with both hands, thrust the blade sharply down into the watery floor. It stopped halfway up the shaft; Morpheus pressed down. Quickly he drew it out, set it in the oarlock, and gripped both oars. "Steady, lad. An we crash on yond gnashers, swim outward and trust to Papa Morpheus."

Alarmed by his words, which I barely understood, I looked about and saw water seeping between the great teeth, dripping down and running into the shallow pool. The water began coming in more quickly, so that our boat started to rock; I had the sense of a shifting beneath us, and suddenly realized that the lower jaw was dropping. Water came rushing in between the wide-spaced teeth—for a moment it was as if we were looking up at a horseshoe-shaped waterfall. The immense teeth, which rose perhaps ten feet, curved sharply, like trees blown by the wind; in the upper jaw I saw fearful tooth-hollows. The tide struck us, rocking us dangerously. Morpheus began to row hard in the tossing pool.

On that swiftly inpouring water we rose higher and higher. The curving tooth-ends stuck up like menacing boulders, then sank out of sight. As we approached the roof of the mouth we were so close to the bony rim that it was clear we had to row carefully or risk cracking our skulls. The swirling pool swept us violently upward, and we would have crashed if Morpheus hadn't lifted an oar and held it against the bony ledge as our boat twisted under; and turning and turning we came rushing out of the mouth at the top of a wave.

3. Beneath the Watery Floor

We plunged splashing into what appeared to be an immense watery chamber, dark except for a number of odd-looking cubes floating in the water. They glowed as if they contained flames. I became aware of a steady thumping sound, and at one end of the cavernous chamber I saw a dim vast machine. Behind us Leviathan loomed for a moment before plunging below. Under the water I heard a deep, muffled sound, like the roar of a distant train, and as if in response the thumping grew louder. From below I heard another muffled roar; the thumping continued, and by the dim light cast against a wet wall I saw that the water level was slowly falling. Our lantern was gone.

Morpheus drew in the oars and sat puffing on his pipe, which had somehow remained lit though water poured from his hatbrim and his cheeks shone with wetness. He removed the pipe and said: "Thus like another Jonah thou hast come out o' the fishbelly. Thou'rt meditative, lad."

"I'm mourning my journal. Why didn't you tell me?"

"Why, 'tis safe as the Bank of England, lad; 'tis safe as the Bed of Morpheus. An a mountain fell on that lovely Leviathan, 'twould shatter like a hill of glass. Floating isles flee from her; armies of sea-serpents be helpless against her; mighty fleets go down before her like toy boats."

"Aye, and in her belly is my book."

"Just so, lad; precisely so. Thou wi' thy lively understanding hast cracked the shell of my thought and extracted the sweet kernel. 'Tis as safe as honor in the breast of a virtuous woman. Nay, honor is not so safe i' the breast of the most virtuous maiden as —"

"Yes yes, but where are we, Morpheus? What's going on? Is the whale down there?" I bent squinting over the side of the boat, as if I were looking for a cork in the water.

"Nay, not below; 'tis too small a bowl for such a fish. She's out i' the Morphean Ocean."

"And we?"

"Drowned, lad. Which is to say, deep-sunk beneath the watery floor. By which I would have thee understand, we sit within the walls of a mountain, that doth grow fro' the floor of mine ocean, and hath her peak deep down i' the watery dark. Leviathan swum in through a great door near the top o' the watery hill, which door did shut after him; those mighty pumps then sucking out some part o' the inward sea, and spewing it back into the outer, we did emerge as upon a pool; and the door opening once again, whilst the pumps did spew, thy journal-loving fish swum back into's ocean, whereat the door slid shut. Is't not wondrous, lad?"

"It couldn't be more glorious. The whale, with my journal, not to mention my clothes, is out in the ocean, and we're in here. Splendid. Sinking fast, I might add." And indeed the level of the water was dropping quite noticeably.

"Is it the wee ironist peeping out? Methought I saw him wi's crossed eyes and red sticking-out ears." Morpheus thrust his pipe back into his mouth, folded his arms over his chest, and sat looking contentedly about.

As the water fell to the thudding of the pumps, I tried to judge the size of the mountain, but found myself hampered by the uncertain illumination provided by the steadily falling lights. The wet walls widened as we dropped, and appeared to soar overhead to meet at an

invisible height. Soon the water began to fall less swiftly, and after a time I felt our boat scrape bottom lightly. As the remaining water drained slowly away, I heard light rattling sounds as the dimly glowing cubes struck bottom. We sat in our boat in the middle of a vast stone floor, patched with shallow pools.

Morpheus stepped from the boat, removed his pipe, and said quietly: "Land ho." He stamped on the wet stone.

"Land ho hum," I said, climbing out after him and putting on my wet cold slippers. "So this is it? What a desolate place, this mountain floor." I looked about at the dim cubes, the puddles, and the stone floor stretching away to soaring wet walls. The floor was smooth, and I noticed that it was composed of large rectangular tiles that had been carefully fitted together. I felt that I was on the floor of a vast dungeon, at the bottom of the sea.

"Come, lad," said Morpheus; and as I followed him our wet slippers slapped against the tiles. I stopped to examine one of the glowing white cubes, which was about a foot across and composed of some translucent white hard substance. The box appeared to be hollow and emitted a steady glow. When I looked up, I saw Morpheus standing some twenty feet away, staring down at the floor. Only as I came up to him did I see that he was looking at a stick or post, knee-high, that rose from between two tiles. "What is it, Morph?"

"The center, lad. We did land some eighty paces fro' the midmost point o' this hollow hill. What think'st thou of our undersea mount?"

"To think you roused me from sleep, for the sake of this view. It reminds me of an extremely roomy dungeon. And yet it looks as if it was once inhabited."

"Think'st thou so? But who would dwell i' the attic, and abandon the house?"

"The attic?"

Morpheus bent over, grasped the post, and pushed it to one side. I heard a whirring noise; slowly one of the large tiles slid aside. I found myself staring at a dark cavity about three feet deep. It appeared to be lined with wood and had narrow benches along two sides. Morpheus stepped down into the opening and reached up a hand to help me in. The moment I was seated I felt something give way. Slowly—a little shakily—we began to descend. A sudden brightness streamed up at me. I squeezed my pained eyes shut, but already I had seen that Morpheus and I were descending through a summery blue sky, in a swaying wooden tub attached to ropes, toward green fields and gardens and white buildings far below.

4. The Palace

As we descended in our tub I squinted eagerly through first one eye and then the other. The brightness appeared to come from above. Directly overhead, the ceiling, or underside of the mountain floor, was entirely covered by glowing cubes, larger than the ones in the dark cavern and emitting a whitish light, although the air looked blue at a distance. Halfway between zenith and horizon shone a brilliant yellow sun. As we descended I noticed that the whitish light emitted by the cubes changed to pale blue and deeper blue the farther down we came. Here and there we passed thick, soft-looking cumulus clouds, whose shadows I could see below. Our tub was suspended from four thick ropes, which paid out slowly and were evidently controlled by a mechanism within the stone floor. Below I saw patches of dark green and bright green, and several little square white buildings.

"Now tell me, Morph, where are we? If anywhere."

Morpheus had pulled the rim of his derby low over his forehead, and looked about with a scowl. "'Tis what they call Atlantis. Hast heard tell of it?"

As we came lower the little white buildings appeared to break into pieces, and I saw that they were towns or cities, enclosed by walls. Here and there little hills or mountains cast shapely shadows.

"But tell me, Morph: wasn't Atlantis an island?"

"So it was, lad, once upon a time; and thy America a wilderness of trees."

"I see. Or rather, I don't see. Atlantis! And I without my journal! 'Twas not well done, Morph, indeed 'twas not well done. Hard to believe we're under that mountain." And shading my eyes I gazed up at the bright-blue sky.

"Therein art thou mistaken, lad: for we're yet within the mountain, here at the bottom o' the sea. That dark cavern above's but the peak or summit, with a floor stretched across. Aye, mighty be the mountains in the ocean of Morpheus. Whoa, pardner. Methinks we approach the base o' this hollow hill."

I was able to make out little trees below, and tiny figures in the fields. Above us the ropes stretched so high into the blue sky that they vanished into blue. Slowly we drifted down into a sunny green meadow spotted with yellow and red flowers.

Morpheus stepped from the tub and I stepped out after him. The richly green grass came up to the bottom of my robe. In the distance I saw a single leafy tree beside a brilliant blue stream. Beyond rose a bright-white wall.

"But what sort of flowers are these?" I asked, bending to examine a gleaming red blossom. The sleek stalk seemed to shine with greenness, and the plump velvety petals were blood-red.

"'Tis a flower of Atlantis, lad; which is to say, a flower Atlantean."

I was about to examine the flower more carefully when a nearby movement startled me, and I turned to see the tub rising on its ropes from the ground. Morpheus made no attempt to stop it, but thrusting his thumbs into his lapels he watched indifferently as the tub rose into the bright-blue air. Shading my eyes and squinting, I gazed after it until it was the size of a cup.

"Better and better," I said. "We're standing in a meadow at the bottom of the ocean and our one connection with life above is drifting away. My possessions at the moment consist of an ill-fitting robe, a pair of wet slippers, and a headache in my right temple."

"Epicurus doth say, the truly wise man is he who can be content with little. Keep thou thy robe and slippers, for they be little, but give away thy headache to the deserving poor; for 'tis but luxurious superfluity."

When I looked up, I could see in the blue sky only a little brown dot, which seemed not to move at all. A moment later it vanished entirely, as if it had dissolved in that solution of blue air.

"Now Morph," said I as we set off toward the white wall, "tell me something about this place. Up there, they say Atlantis was an island —if it ever existed at all. But you say we're walking in a hollow mountain, at the bottom of the Morphean Sea."

"What I say is truth, sweet lad; yet what thy dreamers above do say is likewise so. For what was on high, now is brought low; so doth Fortune's wheel ever turn. Which dark mystery I at some more auspicious moment shall artfully unfold. But hark, what strangers this?"

I had been staring at the grass, for fear of trampling the handsome flowers, and I looked up to see a figure approaching us from the direction of the wall. He was partway between us and the tree, and it occurred to me that he had been sitting in its shade all the while, watching us come down from the sky.

As he drew nearer I saw that he was thin and dark-complexioned, with black hair. He wore a crimson robe that appeared to be of some silken material, loosely gathered at the waist by a black sash. The sleeves were very wide, and the cuffs trimmed in yellow.

He stopped not far from us and addressed us amicably in his tongue. Though thin to the point of frailty, he was graceful and well-proportioned, and gave no sense of weakness or languor. His fingers were long and carefully groomed, and appeared delicately strong.

"He doth welcome us to Atlantis, lad, and invite us to yond palace. Yet first doth he ask us to follow the custom o' the place." Morpheus removed his slippers and thrust each in a pocket. I followed suit, and the three of us proceeded to walk barefoot through the meadow toward the high white wall, which stretched into the distance as far as

I could see. The grass was soft and smooth but concealed occasional small pebbles, so that I had to walk gingerly.

We soon came up to the tree that grew beside the brilliant blue stream, and I stopped for a moment to enjoy the sensation of leafshade and light playing on water. A shaft of sun fell through the thickly leaved branches and slanted down into the deep green shade. A narrow plank-bridge, railed on both sides, spanned the little stream.

I could not help exclaiming over the beauty of the spot, and the richness of the colors of the flowers. When Morpheus conveyed my words the Atlantean seemed pleased, and asked whether I would like to see a leaf fall. I was puzzled by his question but replied that it would give me pleasure. From the depths of his robe he removed a slender black rod and, reaching up, tapped lightly at the base of a twig overhead.

A leaf detached itself and began to fall. It came down in a long slow slant, rocking gently as it passed through patches of sun and shade; about halfway down it began to tremble, and fell swiftly into the shady grass.

The Atlantean stood watching this performance intently, then quickly picked up the leaf and stepped with it into the sunshine. He examined it in his palm. A moment later he placed the leaf in a pocket of his robe, explaining to Morpheus that its fall had revealed a flaw.

I bent down to the blue, blue stream, in whose transparent depths I saw smooth white pebbles, and reached in to retrieve one. A sudden cry from our host startled me, and I yanked out my hand, but not before I had stained my fingers deep blue to the knuckles.

"A pox on rills," said Morpheus. "I'll brook no more o' their babble. Thou'rt blue, lad. 'Tis a sign o' the melancholy."

I was unable to wipe the stain from my fingers and apologized to our host, who stood bent over the water as if searching for damage. He explained through Morpheus that the blue would be removed in the palace.

We stepped across the small railed bridge and continued toward the white wall. It was higher than had at first appeared, and perfectly flat and blank. When we came up to it I saw that it was made of smooth marble, rising to a height of perhaps sixty feet. We followed our host along the base until, for no apparent reason, he stopped and reached a hand toward the wall. Even before the white marble door swung inward I saw or sensed the dim line of its jointure in the surrounding stone. The door admitted us to a corridor that led to a long flight of steps. Behind our guide we climbed many stairs and came out suddenly on a broad, sunny ledge that ran along the inner side of the wall, about halfway to the top, permitting an extensive and bewildering view.

Directly below were lush flower-gardens. The gardens had dividing walls that formed an irregular pattern of rectangles. The walls were pierced by doorways and connected across the top by arched bridges, themselves planted with flowerbeds containing paths and fountains. Atlanteans in red robes trimmed with yellow, and yellow robes trimmed with red, moved among the gardens and upon the bridges. Beyond the gardens there rose an immense and confusing structure of white marble masses, forming a disorderly facade pierced with openings at every level. Arched and flowery bridges extended from our ledge to various openings in the white structure.

I asked whether that was the palace, and was informed through Morpheus that mine was not an easy question to answer. For although in common parlance it was indeed called the Palace, and thus distinguished from the surrounding wall, nevertheless one might readily argue that the wall itself was part of the Palace, for two reasons: first, the entire wall was hollow, containing a labyrinth of interconnected rooms on many levels, and second, the wall was not only connected to the Palace by numerous bridges, but at more than one place crept forward and joined the Palace directly. It was therefore more reasonable to refer to the wall as the Outer Palace, and the building as the Inner Palace, although few bothered with such pedantic distinctions and spoke simply of the Palace, by which they might mean either the Inner Palace, or both the Inner Palace and the Outer Palace; but it was necessary to add that those who dwelled within the Outer Palace referred to it alone as the Palace. The matter was further complicated by the dispute of historians concerning the age and origin of the Palace. For whether by that word was meant the Inner Palace alone, or the Inner and the Outer Palaces, the Palace had not been built at a single stroke, but gradually over an immense stretch of time; and within the inconceivable maze of chambers and corridors were certain chambers and corridors that were said to constitute an original edifice called the Old Palace, although the precise structure and location of the Old Palace were subjects of wide and sometimes heated debate.

I asked how many rooms composed the Palace, by which I meant the structure enclosed by the wall, and our guide replied that the number had never been determined. There were so many chambers that no Atlantean had ever passed through all of them, and they were of so many sizes, arranged with such apparent incoherence, located on so many levels, and connected by so many stairways and turning corridors, that they gave the impression of being inexhaustible. Some indeed claimed that the number of chambers was infinite, an assertion that was surely false but that had never been disproved. As for the surrounding wall, it was in one sense clearly measurable, for one could

walk around the inner ledge in the course of a single day, but in another sense it was immeasurable, for no one had ever been able to traverse the maze of inner chambers even in a lifetime. It was likewise a feature of the wall, or, more strictly speaking, of the surrounding atmosphere, that wherever one stood on the ground outside the wall, or on the inner ledge, at least one perspective appeared endless, for atmospheric density prevented an unobstructed view; and if one stood toward the central portion of the wall, it appeared to stretch endlessly in both directions.

As we strolled along the ledge toward one of the connecting bridges, I remarked upon the striking contrast between the straight wall and the irregular Inner Palace. Through Morpheus our guide explained that Atlantean philosophers and historians had put forth numerous theories to account for precisely that contrast. Some argued that the Inner Palace had been constructed first, over a period of many generations, during which continual additions, as well as a growing sense of exuberance and even irresponsibility on the part of later architects, led to the irregularities that were such a striking feature of its form; disturbed by such extravagance, still later architects enclosed it within a rigidly symmetrical wall. Others argued that the wall had been built first and, once completed, led to a yearning for freedom. Still others argued that the Inner and Outer Palaces grew up together, in a balance of esthetic impulses. The issue was complicated by the adoption of varying attitudes toward the structure of the Inner Palace, some finding it to be disturbingly incoherent, others judging it to be nobly wild. A very small group had for generations sought to demonstrate that the apparent disorder was in fact a vast and subtle order.

We had now reached one of the arched bridges and began walking above the gardens and flowering bridges below. Ours was a great span of marble, covered with turf and rich with flower gardens, fountains, and thick-leaved, blossoming trees. Between rows of high trees we followed a winding path. The branches intermingled to form a green tunnel, through which came shafts of greenish light. At the height of the arch we came to a shady pond, spanned by a slender marble bridge above its perfect reflection. Swans swam in the water, and toward one end there was a small island covered with trees. I was delighted by this bridge within a bridge, itself lined on both sides by lush overhanging plants that trailed in the water, and as we crossed it to the other side of the pond I urged Morpheus to express my admiration for this ingenious scheme. Our host looked pleased, and explained that the "bridged bridge" was an ancient Atlantean art, which in some instances had been carried to intricate extremes; for there were bridges in Atlantis that carried the principle to the fifth and even sixth degrees,

each bridge containing a pond spanned by a narrower bridge.

5. Palace Arts

On the other side of the pond we continued along the down-sloping path of the bridge, which led to the sill of a tall, open window. We followed our guide through the window and found ourselves on a landing near the top of a high and bright-blue chamber, which to my surprise contained a great many clouds. Some of the clouds floated at various heights, while others rested on long tables below. Atlanteans in red or yellow robes stood at the tables or upon tall ladders and appeared to be at work on the clouds. Some were shaping them with their hands, others were applying touches of white and blue and gray by means of slender brushes, and still others appeared to be constructing or repairing them with handfuls of cloud-stuff taken from vats.

As we descended the flight of steps leading down to the floor of the chamber, our host explained that the cloud-artists of Atlantis were highly skilled craftsmen whose work never ceased, for the clouds of Atlantis were continually in need of repair and replacement. The cloud-material, composed of a frothlike substance manufactured in a subterranean cloud-chamber, was exceedingly delicate, subject to easy rupture, and doomed to dissolution by the heat emitted by the lights of the upper sky. A cloud, when laboriously completed, had no fixed and final shape, for the cloud-material was by its very nature unstable. Completed clouds were delivered in boxes to all parts of the kingdom and released into the sky by specially trained scholars. Occasionally a cloud failed to rise, or was wafted back down by an unexpected breeze, to the great delight of children, who jumped into the air and gathered fistfuls of cloud-stuff, which they molded into fanciful shapes.

When we reached the floor we passed along the tables, where I noticed a number of small white dishes containing bright flames. I bent to examine one and was surprised to see that the flame did not quiver, nor did it seem to be rising from a wick or any visible fuel. Our guide, seeing my puzzlement, spoke to Morpheus, who explained that the Atlanteans had mastered the art of fixing flames, by applying to them a colorless waxen substance extracted from a subterranean root. A flame, when fixed, continued to give off heat as well as light, and when applied to a combustible substance gave rise to an unfixed flame. The cubes I had seen in the dark upper cavity of the mountain, and in the Atlantean sky, were composed of translucent slices of marble; each cube contained a fixed flame.

We made our way across the chamber toward a doorlike opening in the far wall. I observed with interest that the room contained many openings, some at floor level and others at various heights accessible by stairways. The heights did not indicate whether an opening was a door or a window, for some doorlike openings served as windows for rooms whose floors were far below ours, whereas several high openings appeared to serve as doors for rooms whose floors were far above.

Behind our guide we passed onto a small landing above a flight of steps. The room was dark except for glittering sunbeams that slanted from wall to floor at many angles, or lay on their sides upon a central table. Several Atlanteans stood with sharp-pointed brushes, stroking at sunbeams and stepping back to examine their work.

Our guide led us down the steps and into the room, explaining through Morpheus that the sunbeams on the left were still somewhat wet, whereas those on the right had dried and were nearly complete. He led us up to a wet, discarded sunbeam in one corner and passed his hand through it, leaving a visible smear and a trace of yellow on his fingers. I expressed astonishment, and asked whether a dry sunbeam was solid. In reply he led us over to a dry beam and passed his hand through it, causing no disturbance except a swirl of gleaming dustmotes. "For look thee, lad, this art of painting on air, like unto that of painting colored images on water, 's a most delicate and subtle craft, which few have mastered." A sunbeam-artist applied to shafts of air a brush dipped in a thickening agent that caused the air to congeal slightly; the dustmotes trapped in the thickened air were then painted separately. The dust took time to dry, and when wet could easily stain and spoil the shaft of thickened air in which it moved. A dry sunbeam retained its shape, while permitting solids to pass through it slowly; but swift movement could break even a finished sunbeam. Broken beams were as a rule exceedingly difficult to repair, and in most instances they were replaced entirely, the remaining pieces being dispersed by rapid motions of the hand after the painted dustmotes were gathered in a sack.

From the chamber of sunbeams we climbed a flight of steps and passed through an opening into what seemed an orchard of neatly spaced trees. The floor was not grass but white marble, and at many of the trees stood Atlanteans, some of whom were mounted on footstools and ladders.

We came up to one broad and leafy tree, where three Atlanteans were at work. One was painting the bark, where a small patch of white still showed; one was kneeling over a root with hammer and chisel; and the third, standing on a short ladder, was removing from a sack individual leaves, which he carefully inserted into small holes along a

twig. Our guide spoke to the man with the sack of leaves, and removing from his robe-pocket the leaf that had fallen swiftly, handed it up. The leaf-man looked at it closely, crumpled it in his fist, and handed our guide a fresh leaf from the sack. Morpheus explained that the leaves were made by master leafsmiths in a remote chamber.

We passed from here into a long corridor, lined with stairways of different heights that led to other openings. As our guide led us up one flight of stairs I heard the sound of rushing water. We stepped through an opening onto the floor of a long, brightly lit room containing a waterfall that poured along one wall, dashed against the marble floor, and ran off in a stream along a channel in the marble. At the end of the room the stream flowed into a great cistern, from which a second channel returned along the length of the room. At the end of the second channel the water was drawn into a pipe that rose to the ceiling. The water in the first channel was clear and colorless; in the second it began as pale blue and grew darker and richer as the stream advanced.

Along the marble banks of both streams kneeled Atlanteans with slender paintbrushes. Beside those at the first stream stood small round pots containing a colorless paste, which they applied carefully to points on the surface of the flowing water. Beside those at the second stream stood pots containing a dark-blue powder.

Our guide explained that artists at the first stream were applying to the water an adhesive substance that spread by the natural action of the moving water, which to a slight but carefully calculated extent thickened and slowed. It was not a matter of haphazard application, for too great an addition produced in the stream an unpleasing sluggishness, whereas too little led to a thinness of color; and unevenness of application caused a blotched or spotty appearance, when the powder was applied. The coloring artists at the second stream were applying a blue powder to the prepared stream. The crystals, a dried extract of a subterranean fungus, clung to the adhesive substance distributed through the stream and, when exposed to light, reflected a sparkling blueness far superior to the blueness produced by crude methods of dyeing.

The thought of blueness appeared to remind him of my blue fingers, and his yellow ones. After exchanging a few words with one of the painters at the second stream, he carried an empty vessel over to the waterfall, filled it with clear water, and urged me to wash my hands. The color did not come off easily, which seemed to please him, for he spoke once again of the superiority of this method of stream-painting. At last it was necessary to sprinkle on my fingers a white powder, which dissolved the blue readily.

We passed from this room through a high window that led to an

open, sunny courtyard. There were pillared walks on three sides and, on the fourth, a marble balustrade that looked down upon another garden far below. Our guide asked whether we would care to rest awhile before continuing, and I replied that I, for one, desired nothing better. Morpheus said that he for his part was not averse to immobility. Along the balustrade stood a number of backless, soft-cushioned marble benches shaded by sculpted trees. Upon one sunny and shady bench I sat gratefully, though rather uncomfortably. Our guide, smiling as if with embarrassment, spoke to Morpheus.

“ ‘Tis a race after mine own heart,” he said, stepping to an adjacent bench and stretching out flat on his back. “ ‘Tis their way, lad; thou upright on thy bench are as one who doth stand upon a bed.”

I lay back on the soft cushions and gazed up through trembling leaves at the rich blue sky. The leaves were so lifelike that on several of them I could see slight rips on the margins, as if they had been nibbled by insects. In the air I smelled a rich, fragrant odor, and turning my head to the nearby gardens I watched several Atlanteans moving among the flowered paths. Each carried what looked like a thin peashooter. Bending carefully over individual flowers, they blew gently into the petals.

“What are they doing, Morph? Inserting little breezes into each flower, I suppose.”

“Nay, lad; they be only your dew-artists, who do trip about amongst the blossoms, bedewing the leaves and petals, as thou dost see. Yet methinks thy fancy’s finer. I know not, whether there be zephyr-artists or no, here in artful Atlantis.”

“It wouldn’t surprise me in the least. It’s a curious place, when you stop to think about it—all this artistic energy in the service of precise imitation. You don’t see implausible trees, strange and impossible flowers. It’s as if art has banished fantasy.”

“Aye and nay, lad; aye and nay. For if it be true that they do follow Aristotle, and ape Nature, yet ‘tis likewise true that this same Nature, which they do mime, stands not all about them in easy companionship, but is remote, wondrous, and strange as any dream. For there be none of Nature’s trees or blossoms, here in the hollow hill at the bottom o’ the sea, but trees and blossoms of fancy only. For they do but copy what their fathers wrought, as their fathers mimed what came before: these forms being but dream-remembrances of that Nature which throve i’ the springtide of Atlantis. For this race once reigned i’ thy restless realm; yet catastrophe o’ertaking ‘em, they did in time find their way t’ the sea-bottom, as thou shalt hear. These artful flowers, these crafted clouds and cunning trees, be naught but an artful Nature, which here doth flourish in Nature’s stead. They do resemble naught, forwhy naught’s here save themselves that they may

mime: wherefore I say, they be fanciful, and ape not Nature. Yet say thou dost maintain against me, that these Atlanteans do in sooth ape Nature, though it be a Nature no longer known, nor remembered: yet is that aping not strict, though most precise. For dost not perceive how these deceiving flowers be too rich in odor and color, like as their streams be too dazzling blue? So doth their art out-nature Nature."

"Aye, Morph; and now methinks their sky doth out-blue blue. Yet say what thou wilt, 'tis strange their art's but a mimic, bringing forth no new forms."

"They do bring forth Nature herself, which being absent, here doth seem new. Yet think not thou know'st all their artful habits; for though they be makers o' Nature, here in Atlantis, yet doth their miming passion take such a turn as seemeth wondrous strange."

Morpheus addressed our guide, who had bent over to smell a flower in a nearby path; and rising from the bench he said: "Come, lad, an thou'lt see the true art o' miming."

6. The Smaller Kingdom

We crossed a garden path to one of the colonnades, and turned into a shadowy corridor that led past many openings to a stairway going down.

At the bottom we continued along another corridor, which turned many times, until at last we came to a room where Atlanteans with gray beards sat on stone benches before three long tables. The artists were bent close to the tables and did not look up when we entered, or when we spoke. Before each of them a fixed flame burned in a white dish. We stopped behind one artist in order to observe him at work. He held a thin rod in one hand, and a small malletlike instrument in the other, with which he tapped the rod. Before him lay a little piece of marble, about the size of the eraser at the end of a pencil. He appeared to be trying to push the piece of marble along by means of tapping it. I glanced at Morpheus, who was staring at the little lump of marble; when I bent closer, I was surprised to see that it was a tiny tree. I bent closer still, and saw that the tiny marble tree had distinct branches and a complex suggestion of foliage.

"These be your court miniaturists, lad, who be rivals to those others in mad miming. But come, look through the glass."

He lifted from the table a small brass tube supplied with a lens. When I fitted the tube to my eye and bent to the miniature tree, I was astonished to see the foliage break into innumerable miniature leaves, each with a stalk and a system of veins. The leaves grew from an intricate array of twigs arranged along the branches; the irregular

diamond-shaped ridges in the bark of the trunk were distinctly visible. I saw that the thin rod was a chisel, with which the artist was delicately sculpting a leaf; and among the leaves I saw a small nest, which appeared to have been woven strand by strand from filaments of marble. The entire tree was white, and I asked Morpheus whether it would be painted, and what it was intended for.

" 'Twill be painted by a master colorist, till it doth seem to live and breathe. Yet wherefore dost ask, what she's intended for? 'Tis one o' the high arts of Atlantis, and doth obey thy Aristotle: for the art o' the miniature doth mimic Nature, though that Nature be but Art. These motes o' marble be placed throughout the Palace, to delight those who do come upon 'em unwitting; nay, 'tis said there's scarce a spot in all the kingdom wants his wee masterpiece. So within the kingdom reigns a smaller kingdom, which doth exceed the first in number and in beauty: for these Atlanteans do crave intricate delights. Come, lad: feast thine eyes."

We proceeded along the table, where with the aid of the brass tube I examined the miniature sculptures under way. One artist had carved from a piece of marble about half an inch long a tiny board marked with squares on which stood twenty-four figures, each dressed in a distinct costume; Morpheus explained that it was the miniature of a chesslike game well loved by the Atlanteans. Another artist had carved from a bit of marble an entire flower garden, with winding paths, Atlantean benches, and, for each flower, individual leaves and petals. And a third artist had carved from a small cube of marble an entire town enclosed by a wall, containing distinct buildings, streets, fountains, temples, courtyards, hanging gardens, and, on the shoulder of a statue in a square, a bird with uplifted wings.

My pleasure and astonishment were so great that I asked Morpheus to express my feelings to our guide, and explain to him that I had seen nothing like it in the upper world.

The guide listened to Morpheus with what seemed to me less than complete pleasure, and replied at some length as we continued along another table.

" 'Tis thus, lad. Thy loose talk o' the upper world did cast a shadow o'er his mind, forwhy 'twas after the great catastrophe that this art o' the miniature did first begin to thrive. 'Tis recorded in dusty documents, how upon that vanished isle there did flourish fashioners o' baubles for children, among which toys were wee images carved in stone; yet was it but a lowly art, and scarce thought on. But when Atlantis Isle did end, then first did that passion flame, for all things perfect and small. Then did these lowly fashioners gin to replicate those things that were no more: and they that did behold them did feel their souls tremble in melancholy ecstasy.

"The rage for these scarce-visible sculptures once begun, 'twas said to lead to curious excesses, each artist vying with all the rest t' achieve abundance within small compass. So 'tis said, how one did take an oaken die and therefrom carve an entire Parthenon, with eight columns at the ends, and seventeen along the sides, and precise figures on pediments and metopes. Then did another, taking up an olive stone, carve in the course of half a lifetime the great Temple of Atlantis, with seven thousand pillars and three hundred rooms; and each of those rooms was furnished with chairs, and tables, and statues, and hangings.

"Then did a fever rage, among the miniature artists of that time: and one did carve, from a lump of oakwood no bigger than a fingernail, the famed Royal Gardens of Atlantis, with its walks and fountains, its temples, its orchards, and its fifty thousand flowers, of more than two hundred distinct kinds.

" 'Twas at this time a weariness did creep in, amongst those that beheld these wonders; and the height o' the passion had already passed when the most elaborate instance was wrought: the island of Atlantis, with all its rivers, mountains, forests, and towns, wherein were all separate buildings and dwelling places, and with all known animals, including over six thousand species of birds, the entire isle carved from ivory and concealed beneath a silver thimble. Then wonder not, that these graybeards carve towns and gardens from chips of stone; for 'tis an art much honored, here at the bottom o' the sea."

7. Court Fashions

We had by this time come to the end of the hall of miniaturists, and we passed through an opening that led down a flight of steps to a long corridor illuminated by red and green lanterns. I was eager to hear more about the history of Atlantis, and to learn the fate of the original island, but my attention was struck by the many openings we passed, some of which gave glimpses into shadowy rooms where I heard women laughing. Morpheus explained that we had passed into one of the courtiers' wings, where court ladies were also permitted. Here and there stairways led up and down, and turning abruptly our guide led us down one of these lesser stairways, which admitted us to a large and crowded hall.

The high ceiling was supported by great pillars, and upon the dark, polished marble of the floor were scattered many three-sided latticework structures that looked like narrow upright cages. In every structure, facing the open end, stood a haughty-looking male

Atlantean in a fur-trimmed robe. The black hair of each Atlantean was extremely long, and had been drawn out in three separate strands that twined artfully, in many branchings, about the white, trellislike enclosure. Whenever one of the courtiers wished to turn his head, he made his wish known to three boy attendants, who at once lifted the entire framework and turned it slowly, while the courtier shifted the position of his feet. Occasionally an enclosure was carried from one part of the hall to another, the attendants moving carefully in step with the bound courtier.

The boy attendants wore bulging robes provided in front and back with numerous pouches or pockets, from which they continually removed objects in response to the courtiers' desires. One boy removed a hinged, double mirror with a long handle and held it up before his courtier, who thus was enabled to look at a courtier standing on his right; another boy drew out a three-pronged ivory rod, with which he gently scratched his courtier's knee. I asked our guide, through Morpheus, whether the courtiers did not find their long hair inconvenient. He looked surprised at my question, and replied that fashions of the court were prized precisely insofar as they caused inconvenience to the wearer, who thereby displayed his disdain for the practical affairs of life and flaunted his power by means of his attendants. Espaliered hair was a recent fashion that had supplanted false fingernails. In the latter case, increasingly long and extremely fragile false nails had been attached to the fingertips until, at the height of the craze, the fingernails had stretched to lengths of twenty feet or more. The false nails had been excessively liable to injury; the courtiers had therefore moved as little as possible, and during their infrequent removals from one room to the next had been accompanied by two attendants, who carried upon their shoulders the fingernails of each hand. The fashion for espaliered hair was already fading, for at its height the craze had been carried to extremes compared with which the present fashion could only be called cautious and modest.

I asked whether the ladies of the court were fond of fashion, and in reply our guide led us back into the corridor to a flight of stairs going down. At the bottom we entered a large and pillared hall. I saw many courtiers, all in their latticework enclosures, and among them stood many Atlantean ladies. They were all dressed in white robes, and around their bodies, from shoulder to ankle, their long black hair was tightly wound in thick, rich stripes. At the ankles the hair appeared to be fastened in a knot. The ladies, when they moved at all, were able to advance only in minuscule steps. Despite their striking and sensual costumes, which gave them an air of teasing helplessness, the court ladies were remarkable chiefly for their breasts. These had been forced violently upward, so that they seemed to grow from the clavicle, and

rose beside the cheeks. The breasts were plump and very white, with brilliant red upright nipples; though both breasts were naked, one was half-concealed by the thick band of encircling hair.

I asked how the Atlantean ladies had made their breasts grow upward, and Morpheus explained that they used a painful method of binding that began in late childhood. The childish nipples were pulled forward, encircled tightly by fine cords, and drawn sharply upward by the cords, which were fastened behind the neck. At the onset of pubescence, marble disks were tightly fastened to the chest, just beneath the nipples. As the breast developed, the nipple was drawn higher and the disk adjusted accordingly. This style of breast, continually refined, had been in fashion for nearly a generation, and had replaced a quite different style known as the quadruple breast. In that style, each breast had been divided lengthwise by means of a tight cord that passed over the shoulder, along the inner side of the nipple, and around the waist to the back. The secondary breasts, each without a nipple, were half the size of the nipped breasts, and were said to have a disturbing erotic power. Other fashions had reigned from time to time, one of the more noteworthy being the tube-breast, in which the breast had been pulled far forward and fastened to slender struts. More secret parts, too, had undergone transformations of an inspiring kind, but alas it was necessary to abridge our colloquy for fear of offending the natives with our impudent staring.

Our guide now spoke to Morpheus, who turned to me. "He doth report, we've reached that portion o' the Palace beyond which 'tis perilous to penetrate, forwhy there be such multiplicity and confusion of chambers and passages, as none who enters there can be certain to find his way back; and he would know, whether we would return t' the Outer Palace, and enter by another way, that thereby we might see other chambers, or whether we would leave the Palace, and see somewhat o' the countryside."

I said that as for me, I had begun to feel a little burdened by the chambers of the Palace, and would gladly have a change of scene; but that I was reluctant to abandon the Palace before seeing everything of interest and importance; and that I would leave the decision to Morpheus.

At this he burst out laughing. "Why, 'twould be more easier far, to name and distinguish each grain o' sand at the bottom o' the Morphean Sea, than to number the chambers o' this proliferous Palace. If thou wouldst dally here, for to see all that piques thy curiosity, thy nose would grow white hairs ere thou hadst fairly begun. Then a pox on this Palace, which doth put me in mind o' mine immortality; and let's away, say I, ere thou grow'st old wi' palace-prying."

Our guide led us along branching corridors and up a flight of

stairs that led into an open place where green islands in blue water were connected by white bridges over undisturbed reflections. At the end of the last bridge we passed through a window leading down to a room where goldsmiths were making leaves and birds, and from there to a dark corridor where Atlantean women stood gazing at us from behind enormous fans with eye-slits; and turning and twisting through chambers and corridors we came at last to a broad dark cellarlike room where I heard the barking of many dogs.

High stone stables lined three walls. Our guide spoke to an Atlantean boy, who opened one of the stable doors and led forth by a bridle an enormous dog the size of a small horse. I drew back in fear and revulsion, for the dog had a powerful smell and its slaver splashed on the ground; and the flat, harsh-looking face reminded me of an angry bulldog's. Morpheus remarked that in Atlantis the only animals were dogs, who were bred for labor.

We followed the boy through a door in the fourth wall and entered a second cellarlike room, where I saw many two-wheeled vehicles of brass, resting on their shafts. The boy attached the shafts to the dog's shoulders, and we three mounted. The sides of the cart came up to my waist; there were no seats, and scarcely enough room for the three of us to stand in. Our guide took the reins; the boy opened another door; and we passed out into the sunny countryside.

8. Traveling by Cart

I was surprised by the sight of distant green hills, and by the absence of the tree and stream. We had evidently emerged from a new wall-side, although it was no less blank and white than the other. Before us lay a flat earthen path that ran through a brilliant green meadow.

As we proceeded at a trot through the rolling meadow, I saw many bright-robed Atlanteans scattered in the fields, some distance from the path. On their backs or at their sides I saw dark sacks. A few walked slowly along, bent sharply forward at the waist, while others reached into their sacks and tossed handfuls into the blue air.

"What're those Atlanteans doing, Morpheus? They appear to be planting, or sowing, or gathering—or are they simply looking for something?"

"Why, thou hast hit all four: for some do plant carven flowers and cunning insects; and some do gather those that be injured, or no longer pleasing to the eye; and some do roam the meadow wi' brush and paint, seeking what Time hath harmed; and some there be that do sow the artful air wi' carven and many-faceted dustmotes, which catching the light do deepen the blue of heaven."

"They're all artists, then?"

"All those who dwell in Atlantis be artists, in some sort or kind. Aye, 'tis an artful country, here at the bottom o' the sea."

"But if all's artifice, grass and flower and sky: what do they do for food?"

"Little, lad; little. 'Tis wellnigh an uneating race, perchance because digestion doth partake o' the natural. They feed in secret places, alone, like as to eat were but part o' the excretory act. They make do wi' seawater purified, and some pallid tubers and mushrumps that grow in caverns under the ground. They feed but rarely, bedunging the world scarce more than butterflies."

"You make me wonder about their sexual life."

"I suspected not, thy high thoughts could sink so low. 'Tis said that love, here in Atlantis, doth attain such richness of cunning elaboration as by comparison the flowers of Atlantis do seem artless and natural. The Atlantean women so disdain directness of wooing, as to take sharp offense at any attention, how faint soever: craving in a lover only a display of indifference, through which by subtle means he doth delicately convey his unmentionable and unshowable desires. She likewise through intricate shows o' boredom doth hint, now with a subtle yawn, now with a weary pose, at all that lies forever unspake betwixt 'em. 'Tis this great pressure o' the unspoken and unshown that doth grow and grow, raising blushes to modest cheeks; till the supreme moment comes, when without touch, in a crowded chamber, she doth erupt in secret and suppressed orgasmus, which he who hath wakened it doth detect in her only through a half-closing of eyelids, a faint tenseness about the nostrils, and a tremor i' the hand. Now when the blissful lover witnesseth the change in her, he doth melt in private ecstasy: which melting she doth sense in him through a faint frown and the tensing of a muscle in's cheek. 'Tis said this scarce-shown ecstasy hath in it such inner fervor as crude coupling cannot rival. This coupling is saved for marriage, and is performed but once, on the wedding night, for the furthering o' the race; if the bride swell not, she hath no second chance; yet that the race may be furthered, a man may take him a second wife. 'Tis not coarse coupling they mean by love, but untouching ecstasy, which wives and husbands do also know."

The flowery fields had by this time given way to rougher country, where great rocks thrust up among stiff weeds, and bleak hillocks, covered with brown grass, erupted on both sides of the rutted and stony path. I was surprised by the desolation of the country and the disrepair of the path, and puzzled by the nearness of the large hill, which had seemed much farther away when we set forth. I could not account for the swiftness of our progress, for the dog had never exceeded an easy trot. When I looked over my shoulder I saw that

indeed we had come a long way, for the Palace wall was so low and distant that it looked like a faint streak on the horizon.

"Very peculiar, Morph, if you ask me; aye, exceeding strange. Yond hill doth seem near, that once was far; yet have we scarce begun our journey. And I would fain know, whether those artists i' the meadow have not yet reached this part o' the country, which hath about her a most rough and unfinished appearance."

"Why, here be two mysteries old Morphery can unravel. And first: yond hill, which once did seem far, as the Palace wall now seemeth far, was yet near, as that Palace wall is near: yet be they far-seeming, when viewed through veils of artful air. For those same motes, which in a throng do azure the welkin, do likewise serve as a perspective glass, through which all that's seen appeareth far. And second: this countryside, which seemeth but rough-hewn, is no less artful than those meadows, that lie without the Palace wall. 'Tis said that on a day, when all the artful country round the Palace was meadow, stream, grove, and flower, a child playing i' the grass did find a small thing, whereat he wondered. 'Twas no bigger than a leafbud, yet more heavier; white m dark speckles; hard; and neither round nor square, but shapeless and uneven. This hard white bud, when he did show it to's father, caused great wonder and perplexity; and his father traveling t' the Palace, there did ask, if any knew what thing this was. Then throughout the Palace a great whispering did commence, for none did know what it might be; till at the last, philosophers and sages did assemble, to see whether they might learn, what thing the child had found i' the grass. Now when they were met, and did examine the object gravely, some saying hum, it might be this, and others saying hum hum, mayhap 'twas that: then did an old servant-woman, who had come with a pitcher of water to fill their glasses, see that thing, and say, why, 'tis a pebble. Which when they heard, they did ask, what thing a pebble was; and she did say, her mother's mother told a tale, of a land where trees and flowers grew like living things, and where i' the earth lay small hard things called pebbles. Then was there great rejoicing, that a pebble was found in Atlantis: and all that beheld it did crave to see it again, forwhy 'twas a thing which none had made, and showed forth no clear and distinct shape. Then did a rage for pebbles come o'er the land: and artists did 'gin to carve them, from treasure chests of precious jewels stored i' the Palace. The rage once begun, did lead to larger and larger stones, which thou dost see about thee, here 'twixt the meadow and the hill. Now 'tis plain, this tale's but a fable: for 'tis said the child doth find the pebble when all the country hath turned to art: yet they that make trees o' marble, must mine that marble, and so know pebbles. Yet hath the fable his truth, for what's their pebble-wonderment but longing for that wilder and untamed

Nature which field and flower cannot satisfy? Yet be these wilder parts no less artful, for they be carved and colored by Palace artisans. But see, the hill's upon us."

We had come to the base of the broad hill, which rose above us to about twice the height of the Palace wall. The bottom portion was rocky and bare, but I noticed that halfway up the roughness changed to smooth grass and bright flowers. Our guide led us along the rocky and rutted path, which wound around the base of the hill and continued in a slowly ascending spiral. The path was bordered by cliffs on one side and a drop on the other. Our ascent proceeded calmly until all at once the dog, who had seemed tame as a cow, began to growl low in his throat and strain at the reins. Around the bend we approached a narrow cave-opening, from which I heard faint sounds. Our dog champed at the bit and tugged toward the cave, but our guide, jerking at the reins, led us firmly past.

"But what's the cave, Morpheus? There's something inside." And I strained to look back, drawn by the mystery of the cave.

Morpheus spoke to our guide, who appeared to argue; after a sharp exchange, the cart drew to a halt.

"Come, lad. Hell await us on the path."

"He seemed a little irritable."

" 'Tis his nose, lad. These Palace folk be someddeal finical."

I followed Morpheus through the cave-opening, and at once became aware of an unpleasant odor, which grew stronger with every step. We were advancing along a short tunnel that abruptly widened into a cave. At the threshold I stopped, overcome by the powerful stench. In a pit a small fire burned, and all about the cave stood large mounds of excrement about six feet high. By the wall of the cave crouched several naked creatures, their bodies, faces, and hair smeared with wet, gleaming excrement. I heard a sound, and turned to see a filthy creature crawl with slippery sucking sounds from one of the piles and squat against a wall. I noticed others crawling from the walls and pushing themselves slowly into the hardening piles. Several of the smeared creatures scooped up handfuls of dung and bent their heads to eat. One or two glared dully at us with fire-glowing eyes. Occasionally I heard quiet grunts; these were the only sounds, except for the soft slippery sloppings and suckings of bodies moving in and out of the mounds.

Overcome with disgust, I turned back through the tunnel and stepped onto the bright path with a loud explosion of held-in breath. The stench of the cave-air seemed to cling to me, and as I stepped away from the opening I shook my robe, as if bits of filthy air were sticking to it.

Morpheus stepped onto the path, peered anxiously in the wrong

direction, then looked the other way. When he saw me his look of alarm changed to radiant joy.

"Why, lad, knowing thou dost dote on caves and darkness, I much feared me, lest thou had crawled off into a sweet dank dungheap, wherein thou hadst found such store of bliss as I might ne'er hope to see thee more: yet do I find thee at the last, fretting i' the feter o' the sunny day."

"Who are they?" I grimly inquired, as we strode to the cart and got in. Our guide gave a sharp shake to the reins, and we set off at a trot.

"They do call themselves Nature's Children, lad, whom some do call anti-Atlanteans: yet be they true Atlanteans all, who spurning unwholesome artifice, do seek the natural and true. In caves and woods they dwell, far fro' the false light o' the sun: wearing no clothes, refusing to clean themselves, and living in their own slow-heaped excrements. They be sired by diverse kinds, as your courtiers, your sunbeam artists, your philosophers and painters of streams: yet on a day each doth feel an inward gnawing, which doth drive him to seek he knows not what: for his whole soul's a rebel 'gainst all that is. So do they find their way to the dark holes o' the kingdom, wherein they dwell in heaps of dung. And though your sunny Atlanteans despise 'em, yet do they feel as 'twere a wrathful respectfulness, forwhy they know 'tis but their own high craving crudely writ. For these Atlanteans be a haunted race, and in all things do cling to their vanished past: yet living removed from that first and scarce-remembered place, and remote from all save those few who pass this way, they do evolve in strange and curious wise. But come, let's leave these dung-eating latitudes for purer climes."

Sweeping out his arm, Morpheus seemed to usher us from the wild and rocky portion of the hill to the gentle regions of the upper slope. Here the earthen path was flat and smooth, bordered on the right by a low marble parapet and on the left by a gentle slope of bright-green grass and blood-red flowers. We had not gone far when I saw on our left a flight of grassy steps which ascended to an arched opening above our heads. At the sight of the opening I held my breath, and did not release it until we were well beyond. As we continued to circle the hill, we passed several of these grassy stairways, each rising to an arched entrance. Morpheus said nothing, and despite a growing curiosity I refused to inquire, for fear of being led into another foul place. Below us the green kingdom of Atlantis, under a blue sky, stretched away, and I could almost imagine that I was on a hillside in the upper realm, on a sunny summer's day.

"What say'st, lad? Wouldst care to sniff out another cave, wi' thy enquiring nose?"

"Nay, Morph, I've learned my lesson. But tell me, pray, what caves

those be, above the grassy stairs."

"Why, methinks thy nose doth lead thy will astray, making thee fearful to see wi' thine own eyes. Wouldst sniff out the world fro' blossom to blossom, turning away from all that doth offend thy dainty nose-thirls? Dost hope to scribble a history thus? Tell me, lad, shalt entitle it *Carl Hausman His Odoriferous Odyssey: or, A Promenade Amongst the Primroses*? Shalt call her *Morpheus His Redolent Realm: or, A Prose-Posy of Fragrant Fancies in Flowery Phrases*? Why, in thee th'inhaling world shall have her new Sweetonius; thou'lt out-perfume Livy wi' thy *History of Aroma*. 'Snose, methinks thou'rt more scently than Augustine. I'd sooner sniff one o' thy leaves than twenty Xenofronds."

" 'Sdung, thy heaped wit doth befoul my sweet humor. I like not the caves of Atlantis, yet I'd not have it said, Carl Hausman did shy away from truth, forwhy he liked not her smell. Then fie, nose, I'll hearken no more to thee, but will follow mine eye to my sole mistress, Truth."

"O loathsome and most foul speech!—for thou dost hint, thy mistress may be dung. But come, lets seek her there."

We had come to another grassy stairway leading to an opening; at a word from Morpheus our cart halted. Morpheus dismounted and swiftly climbed the grass steps, I hurrying up behind him. At the top he turned and called down to our guide, who seemed to hesitate before picking up the reins and setting forth along the path. I watched him pass out of sight around the bend, then stepped behind Morpheus into the opening at the top of the stairs.

I held my breath as we passed along a narrow, arched tunnel. We soon came to a flame-lit room, whose walls were covered from floor to ceiling by marble shelves tightly stuffed with papyrus scrolls. In the room stood half a dozen long marble tables, and on carpeted benches before both sides of the tables sat Atlanteans, poring over large, opened scrolls and writing on smaller ones. Four arched doorways led to further rooms; a circular stairway at one end led down, and a circular stairway at the other end led up. Most of the Atlanteans were grave and smooth-faced youths, though I noticed several older scholars with short brown beards. A few glanced at us as we entered, and at once returned to their labors; most ignored our intrusion entirely, though without ill-will. Fixed flames in shallow white bowls shone at intervals along the tables and shelves.

Morpheus led me to the rail of the descending stairway, where I looked down into an identical room, with arched doorways leading to further rooms. He then led me back to the ascending stairway, and I followed him up to another room of scrolls and scholars, with four

open doorways. Passing through several rooms we ascended a stairway to another room of scrolls and scholars; and in this manner we made our way up from level to level, until I climbed behind Morpheus into a shady grove at the top of the hill.

9. *In the Grove*

Yellow sunbeams came slanting through the Atlantean trees. I ducked under one, fearful of injuring it. In the center of the grove stood a marble table surrounded by four marble benches; upon the table was a large white bowl of purple grapes, which I gazed at hungrily. A dark Atlantean boy, seated on a nearby rock, smiled at us. Morpheus led me through the trees and out onto the sun-flooded grass, from which I looked down at the rocky country below, the green fields farther on, the tiny artists working in the fields, the dark strip of path, the little white rectangle of the Palace, and the green fields and bluish hills beyond. Winding bright-blue streams or rivers shone in the meadows. High over all, the rich blue sky seemed to stretch endlessly away.

"And yet," I said suddenly, turning to Morpheus, "it must end. Down there. We're in a mountain—it's got to end."

"Aye, lad: she doth end. Beyond the blue hills, there be farther hills, which do fade into the horizon; yet these farther hills be but painted pictures, on the side o' the inner mountain wall. And the Atlanteans knowing all doth end, journey not t' the edge o' the kingdom, but stop at the rough borders o' the land, where all doth by artful perspective seem to fade endlessly away. 'Tis so all round, as thou mayst see."

So saying he led me around the hilltop, until we had circled the central grove. Everywhere the fair fields of Atlantis stretched to bluish hills, under the rich and always summer sky; and again I gazed down at the little Palace, which seemed so far away.

" 'Tis a strange race, Morph, who do live as 'twere knowingly in illusion: creating brightness, here at the dark sea-bottom."

" 'Tis no more stranger than thine own: for ye do wander on your earth-bubble within your little globe o' sky, dreaming and scheming, dreaming and scheming: yet are ye dust, and must die."

"Yet methinks there's this difference, that these Atlanteans do strive to live in illusion, whereas those above—those above—"

"Aye, lad?"

"Faith, I know not, what I would say. It hath slipped away. 'Sdeath, methinks these Atlanteans do make me melancholy, Morph: aye, 'tis a sad-eyed race, here i' the bright hill. But tell me, Morph, who are they, i' the rooms below? For I've a tenderness for all those that do

pope over words, be they gods or mortals born."

" 'Tis forwhy thou'rt a damn'd scribbler. Those below are they who seek the past of Atlantis: striving to winnow truth from legend, i' the library i' the hill."

"So: the past of Atlantis. It's a subject that never interested me, up there; but now I've a craving to hear her true history. You mentioned —"

But here a clattering interrupted me, and a moment later the cart came into view around a bend of path directly below. Morpheus led me back into the grove, and we waited for our guide to circle the hilltop and drive up onto the flat grassy summit. The path led directly to the grove, on the side away from the Palace, and it was there, in the border of shade, that we and the young Atlantean greeted him. When he had dismounted, the boy took the immense dog by the bridle and led it to a tree, where he lightly hitched it to a low branch. The dog looked lazily about; and slowly it sank down in the shady grass, lowering its fierce head sleepily onto its paws.

Accompanied by the boy, our party made its way to the marble table in the grove, where we sat down in sun and shade. From a stone chest that lay partly concealed in the darkness of nearby trees, the boy removed three bowls, which he placed before us on the table. The bowls were of white marble, blue-veined. Morpheus picked up a small bunch of grapes, which he studied with interest before offering them to me. I reached for them hungrily, realizing even as I did so that they were the work of grape-craftsmen, and only to be admired. The boy returned with a pitcher, from which he carefully poured a small amount of pale-yellow liquid into each bowl. Our guide raised his bowl in both hands and spoke, looking from Morpheus to me.

"He doth wish us health and happiness, lad, and a safe voyage through the dark waters. Aye, 'tis safe to drink, yet scarce fit to quench the thirst of a pismire. 'Tis their wretched tuber-wine." So saying, he lifted his bowl and gulped down the wine.

I raised my bowl to my lips and sipped the wine cautiously. It had the disappointing taste of cold weak tea.

"Tell him that I wish him health, long life, and many visitors from the dark waters above. Thank him for showing us the Palace and the hill, and tell him that I'm curious to know something of the history of Atlantis."

Morpheus spoke to our guide, who turned to me with a look of surprise, and spoke as if putting a question.

"He doth express amazement, for he did suppose there were none alive who knew not the history of Atlantis."

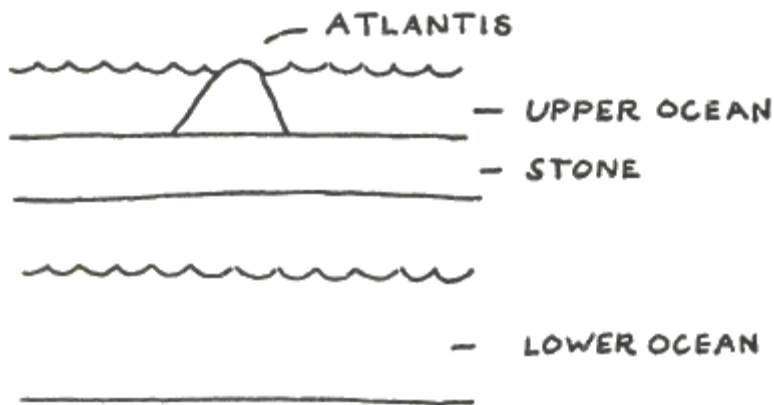
Our guide spoke again, at some length; and as he spoke I looked at his long, delicate fingers, his slender and beautifully shaped skull, his

intelligent, dark, melancholy eyes.

“Sdeath, lad, these Atlanteans so love to prattle o’ their past, as a god may wither listening; and though each particle o’ the story be disputed by some, and dismissed by others, and though the scrolls do contradict themselves, and raise doubts, questions, and uncertainties concerning each minutest moment o’ vanished time, and though the antiquity and authority o’ the scrolls be themselves subjects of endless argument, yet in broad outline do scholars agree. Now by scholars I mean not those readers below, who here and in other hollow hilltops do study some few thousands o’ scrolls that be copied from amongst untold thousands of thousands lodged in innumerable chambers in the Inner and Outer Palaces. These hill-readers and hill-scribblers making commentaries upon all that they read, do hope in time to be called t’ the Palace, there to study and sift the high-heaped scrolls and commentaries i’ the Palace libraries, under the watchful eyes of Palace scholars: till on a day being declared fit to take on apprentices, they do attain scholarship. Now these scholars, though they dispute amongst themselves like so many fishwives, and seek to discredit the false views of other scholars, do nevertheless i’ the main agree upon the broad sweep and main shape o’ the history of Atlantis, which general history hath small interest for ‘em, intent as they be upon the multifarious minutiae. And that history is this: that Atlantis was an island in Upper Ocean, there i’ thy changeful realm; that this island kingdom, which was but the top of a mountain, did slowly sink beneath the sea; and that ere the waters did o’erwhelm Atlantis, those that dwelled on the isle did discover a passage leading down to a great cavern i’ the mountain. ‘Tis all their history, i’ the shell of a nut. Think no more on’t.”

“But wait, Morph. If they escaped into the mountain in Upper Ocean, how did they arrive in Lower Ocean?”

“Sdeath, wouldst know all the petty circumstances?” Irritably he reached into his robe and removed a piece of crumpled damp paper, which he smoothed out on the marble table with the side of his hand. With a stub of chewed pencil he drew a small sketch on the paper.

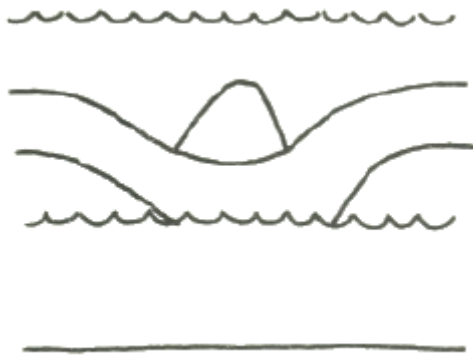


“ ‘Twas thus ere they sunk into legend, lad. Th’Atlanteans, seeing the slow sinking o’ their kingdom i’ the course o’ many generations, did seek to build up their land, sending out triremes to neighbor isles, and bringing back stone and sand wherewith to raise their shore; which stratagem failing, they did turn to thoughts o’ migration and conquest, for their scrolls show they were mighty upon the sea. Now while their council did consider, whether it were wise to set sail east towards the legendary city of Athens, or west upon the unknown waters, lo, word did come, that a boy at play in a field had fallen through the earth; and those that rescued him did tell of a great cavern under the ground. So was it decided, to remove into that cavern, against what time the waters should wash over them. Then did they move great store of goods below, and animals, and all manner of possessions; and they did discover a vasty mine of marble, there i’ the hollow beneath the isle.

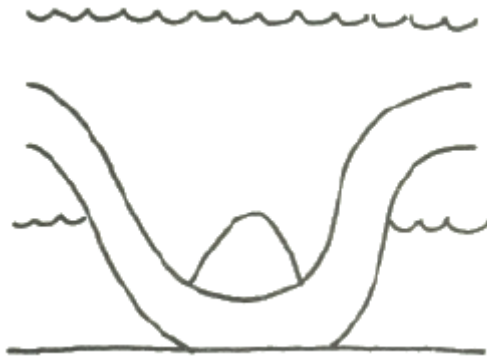
“So for a time they lived now above, and now below; yet always the land sunk lower, till on a day they moved into their inner kingdom, and closed off the opening: all save some few, who stayed above, i’ the ruins o’ the kingdom, and did drown.

“Now while that the Atlanteans lived i’ their cavern, building new dwelling places and farming the rocky land, that their race might continue: so all the while the mountain did sink lower. For ‘tis said the great band of stony stuff, which doth separate Upper Ocean from Lower Ocean, and which some say hath a molten middle, did at that time slow buckle, o’er the course o’ many generations; and the histories and legends of islands in Lower Ocean do speak of a falling o’ the sky. So did the isle of Atlantis sink beneath the waters of Upper Ocean: which sinking, according to thy Plato, did happen nine thousand years ere the time of Solon.”

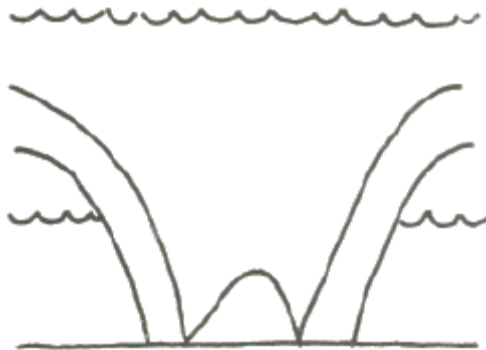
He smoothed the paper impatiently and drew a second sketch beneath the first.



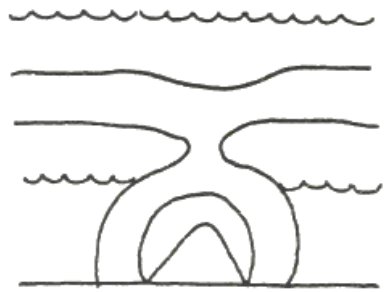
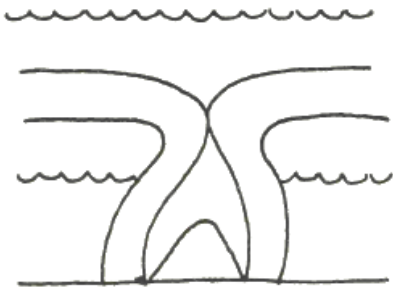
"I' the course of untold eons of earthly time, this bend or buckle did sink lower beneath the wave, till at the last it joined the floor of Lower Ocean.



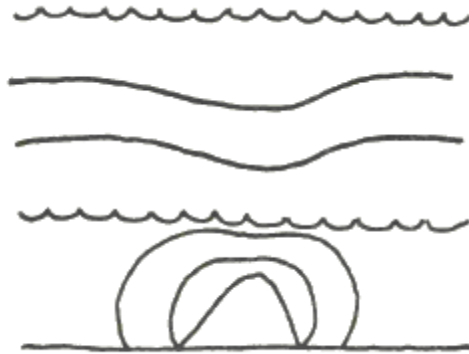
"Then did that part beneath the mountain slow break up, scattering o'er the ocean floor, till the mountain was itself upon the floor.



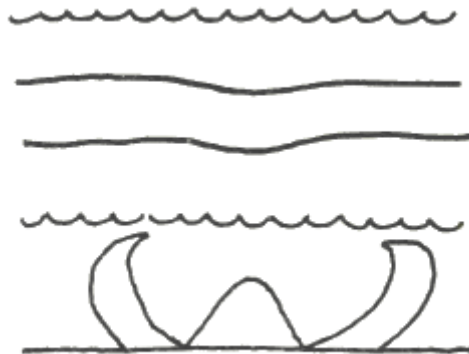
"I' the slow course of ages, that broke band of stony stuff did as 'twere creep together.



“And the time came, when the floor of Upper Ocean was again become an unbroke heaven to the waters below.

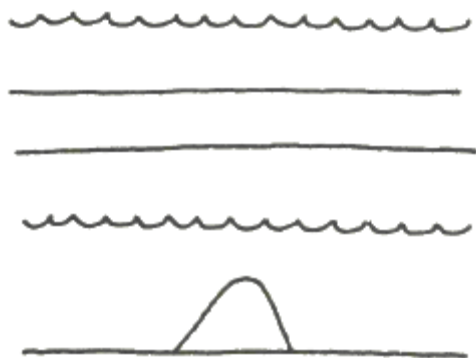


“Now was the mountain within a shell of stone. And the shell about the mountain slow-cracking under the pressure of Lower Ocean, the waters without did seep drip-dropping in: till on a day there came a great bursting, and a rush of waters: and lo, the mountain was once again sunk beneath a sea.



“And some do say, there’s a shallow hollow yet, i’ the floor of Upper Ocean, ‘neath which Atlantis lies. The remains o’ the shell did slow break apart and scatter, leaving no trace save great boulders on

the ocean floor. I'll end my pictured history thus:"



"Why, I do thank thee, Morph; and I do hope thou'lt make me a gift o' thy paper, that I may add thy drawings to my history. For a book without pictures is a dreary thing, as drowsy Alice did think one day, ere she fell into the arms o' Morpheus. Now do I see, these Atlanteans live as 'twere inside their island: thus be they a sunken and inside-out race. But Morph, thou didst say, they brought with 'em animals, and seed, and did farm below; yet hast said, there be no animals save great dogs, and naught that grows save tubers and mushrumps. And thou didst tell of a cavern i' the mountain; but methinks a cavern's not so great a hollow as this."

"Yet there's no mystery: for thou dost forget, unmindful lad, sweet Time. For Time's a rubbing element, wherein all who walk do change. They in that cavern 'neath the Atlantean isle, i' the topmost o' the mountain, did plant trees, and grain, and grapevines; and they did milk their kine, and eat hens' eggs, and bake bread; and they did mine their marble, that they might build white cities. And mining their marble, they did form valleys and hills i' their cavern kingdom; and some foreseeing how their slope-sided realm would widen an they digged at the edges, lo, a great digging and deepening and widening did come to pass, till that they had sunk their cavern floor far down; yet all the while, their hills grew higher, forwhy they had no place where they might set their dirt and stone. So were there deep valleys and high hills, and cities atop the hills, and farms i' the valleys, in that Atlantean age. And some do say, that was the Golden Age of Atlantis i' the Hill; yet others say, 'twas a rude age, and harsh, which did look back longingly on their island time.

"Be that as it may, the Atlanteans were a restless race, who craved continual widening o' their bounds: so did they delve deeper, heightening their hills. 'Twas in this time that a great work was accomplished, which had it been wrought i' thy realm, 'twould ha' been reckoned the first wonder o' the world. For they did build them a

great roof, dividing the upper cavern fro' the lower: which roof, though it did seem to rob 'em of room, yet was it builded for to increase their empire. And in this upper chamber o' their cavern, they did build mighty pumps, and carve a great door t' the sea: and all to one end, that they might take the earth and stone which they dug below, and empty it into the outer waters. Then did they cut away hills below, and dig ever deeper, lifting the earth in great buckets t' the upper chamber, where they spilled it into wooden chests. And when 'twas time to banish those chests, then did they ope the great door, that the upper chamber might fill with ocean; and in that sea-filled chamber naked Atlanteans, carrying stones about their necks, and breathing through long tubes that reached into the chamber below, did walk upon the watery floor. And they did push those chests through the great door into the sea.

"So by degrees did these Atlanteans sink lower i' the mountain, broadening their kingdom, and heightening their heaven, till they did strike a marshy stratum: whereupon much concerned, lest water rush in fro' beneath, they did build a small way upwards, leveling their highest hills to fill the valleys. Then did they know they'd reached the bottom o' their new empire, and with it their furthest bounds.

"Now at this time Atlantis was still a fertile kingdom: forests grew on the slopes o' their hills and in many valleys, sheep grazed i' the meadows, apple orchards and fields o' wheat ripened o'er the land. Yet did this very abundance breed a carelessness, i' the Atlanteans o' that age; for they were far removed fro' their island past, which was grown half into legend; and the younger Atlanteans mocked at such tales. And mayhap forwhy their empire could grow no more, they did turn their energy inward upon their kingdom, plund'ring as 'twere their own treasure of trees. They did build great ships to sail their salt rivers, like as they did plan a war o' conquest; yet 'twas but restlessness drave 'em thus. They did build great wooden cities and palaces; and slowly the forests disappeared fro' the hillsides and valleys. And there was much gathering of fruit, and making of wine, in those careless days; and though they were heedful of harvest, yet did they somedeal neglect the sowing of seed. So did their flocks grow small, and their farms lie half-neglected; yet was it not too late to replenish their shrinking store o' Nature, for some did see clear, and cry out against neglect.

"Yet i' the end was Nature routed, and this for two causes. And the first was this, that a sickness did carry away their sheep and kine, and a blight ravage their fields, like as Nature herself did hasten to complete, what they had heedless begun. And the second was this, that many did disdain the tyranny o' Nature, and long to o'erthrow her, by replacing her changefulness with undecaying works: and these

did rejoice i' the ruin of her reign.

" 'Twas at this time the carvers o' marble trees sprang up, fro' the ranks o' the court miniaturists; and when a tree was cut down, a stone tree did replace it. So by degrees was living Nature quite driven fro' the kingdom, save for some caves underground; and in time the wooden cities and palaces decayed, leaving naught but stone. The sheep, the kine, the goats, the pigs, the worms, the very flies o' the air, all, all did pass away, save only some few palace dogs, that were the pets of court ladies: and these being kept below, were bred for size, that they might pull ladies i' their brazen carts. Aye, their very robes, which once were linen and wool, be now woven from fibers o' stone, upon marble looms, deep i' the Inner Palace.

"Yet think not, this restless race hath come to an end o' striving. For though they ha' driven living Nature into far corners o' the kingdom, where she doth continue her little breath o' life, yet there be many who do protest the tyranny of unliving Nature, and in especial, marble stone: and 'tis said that e'en now, i' the depths o' the Palace, scholars labor to o erthrow the reign of stone and air, creating new substances that some say be derived fro' the lush heart of Nothing."

I imagined a bearded Atlantean standing in a dark, empty chamber, shaping the darkness into lumps of matter with his long, delicate, carefully groomed fingers.

"Well, Morph: methinks they who have learnt to fix the flame, can bring forth what they will fro' Nothing; for 'tis a most noble and artful race, though melancholical."

"Dost think 'em melancholical?"

"Aye, Morph; there's a something in their eyes, doth make me say so."

" 'Tis forwhy they breathe: for all that's alive is melancholical, mortal or immortal born."

"So it may be: yet methinks they're melancholical forwhy they be children o' the upper world, and dream o' their island past, down here i' the bright mountain, under the dark sea."

"Thou dost sound melancholical, lad."

"I spake not of me," I replied sharply, bending quickly to my bowl.

Morpheus and our guide now conversed, while I sat gazing through the shady trees at the bright countryside. From time to time I looked at our gentle host, with his prominent cheekbones and heavy-lidded eyes. He lived in a bright corner of the realm of Morpheus, yet his race had their origin in the upper realm. The Atlanteans as a race had taken a voyage down into the realm of Morpheus: and here they remained, at the bottom of the ocean, dreaming of green, green grass and blue, blue sky. They were bound to the upper world, which they

imitated in their Art of Nature; and yet, for them, the upper world had already turned to legend. And here sat I, Carl Hausman, an Atlantean among Atlanteans, for hadn't I too journeyed down from above, and hadn't I too mined my marble and begun to build me a word-palace of many chambers? And were we not a melancholical race, we sea-bottom builders and dwellers? Yet was I no true Atlantean, for why my words aped not Nature, but those unnatural forms I found below; and I strove not to deceive the eye with fair and pleasing shows, but to shadow forth in words all that mine eyes did truly see.

My thoughts were interrupted by a shadow that swung back and forth across the sunny-and-shady table. Looking up I saw a shape falling toward us from the brilliant sky. I was so startled that I stared in motionless alarm a moment, before shouting "Watch out!" and springing from my seat.

10. Above the Sky

Morpheus glanced up lazily and continued speaking with our guide, who appeared to be alarmed by my violence and made gestures as if to calm me. I had already seen that the falling shape was a tub, descending on swaying ropes. As it came closer I saw that it was not directly above us; and slowly it came to rest at the edge of the grove, beside the cart and dog.

"Now, sweet lad, methinks 'tis time for thee, and me, to soar above the sun: for though we be welcome to linger for all eternity, here in bright Atlantis, yet till they dream a potable wine I'm for darkness and the gushing grape. What say'st, lad? Woo't linger?"

"Oh, maybe, probably—if I had my journal. But I can't rest easy, knowing it's floating around in your damnable ocean. Then let's go, old tub-rider—aye, ere the lure of Atlantean history doth draw me to the rooms below."

Our party strolled through the grove to the waiting tub. My practiced eye saw at once that the tub was of marble, carved and painted to resemble wood. The ropes were iron. "Deus in machina," remarked Morpheus, as he climbed in by way of a small footrest projecting from the side; I quickly followed. Morpheus raised both palms and delicately adjusted the brim of his hat. Our guide spoke, gazing from one to the other of us in grave and melancholy farewell.

"He doth wish thee well, lad, i' the land over the waters."

"Which land over the waters?" I asked, but already our tub had risen from the ground. The boy waved and the dog lifted its head as we rose slowly over the trees. Below us and to one side I saw the swaying shadow of our tub, thrown along the bright-green leaves; and

as the dog lowered its head sleepily onto its paws, we rose higher and higher into the rich blue sky. Soon the trees of the grove grew together in a dark-green patch, the cart was a glint of brass, the little hill cast a sharp shadow; and far, far below, on the green fields stretching away, I saw little white, walled towns that reminded me of Palace miniatures. The white towns became tiny white squares that started to tremble and suddenly vanished. We began to pass soft and slowly changing clouds, and looking up I saw the sky fading to paler and paler blue, until I could make out the white radiance of the cubes.

"But the fuel," I said suddenly, turning to Morpheus. "For new flames."

"Hair clippings," he replied.

Above us I now saw a small dark space, not visible before; and slowly we rose into a black shaft. There we halted, but at once began moving sideways along a dark passage. Again we came to a stop; above us an obstruction drew aside. I rose from our tub and stepped behind Morpheus onto the cold stone floor of the dark upper chamber. Here and there sat glowing cubes.

I saw that we were closer to one wall than when we had descended; our boat lay several hundred yards distant. Morpheus, making wet slapping sounds with his bare feet, strode eagerly to it and stepped inside with a splash. He bent over and began rummaging noisily about. As I came up to the boat he rose grimly, holding a hank of dripping rope. He was standing ankle-deep in water.

"'Sblood, I did misremember grievously, fancying our boat held Heklo's bottle; yet so hungry am I that I could gnaw a rope."

He lifted the rope to his mouth and bit savagely into it. Raising his eyebrows in sudden surprise, and smacking his lips meditatively, he said: "It hath somewhat of cold boiled slipper, pease porridge, and eel pasty; and a touch of wet haystack withal."

He held out the rope earnestly, inviting me to eat.

"Why, I do thank thee, Morph; yet I much fear me, lest swallowing such a meal, I'll come t' the end o' my rope."

"Why, thou knave, thou rogue, dost think sweet Morpheus would rope thee in?"

"Nay, sweet Morph. It's just that I don't know the ropes."

"Say not so, sweet lad. Methinks thou hast the hang of it. Why, thou'rt a very Rope-me-o."

"Now you've got me on the ropes."

"Then must thou fight with a rope around thy neck."

"Hang it all, Morph, I've run out of rope! I'll banter no more wi' thee."

"What? On thy high ropes? Beware, lest I give thee a taste o' the rope's end."

Flinging down the rope, which splashed water against his robe, he sat down suddenly with a sigh. A moment later he looked up. "Wherefore dost stand there?"

I pointed. "There's water in the boat."

"Aye, and the ocean hath her touch o' damp; the ocean hath her moiety o' moistness. Wouldst wipe the sea wi' thy hankercher, that thy toes may stay dry? 'Sdeath, he hath searched the ocean depths, and discovered Atlantis, yet doth he hold sulking back forwhy he'd not have wet feet. No no, Carl Hausman will not have wet feet."

Muttering to himself, Morpheus rose, stepped splashing from the boat, and bent to the gunwale. Together we tipped the boat sideways. Water rushed along the floor, grew slower and slower, and stopped, forming a long irregular patch, like a distorted shadow.

I stepped into the boat and sat down. Removing my wet slippers from my pockets, I placed them on my feet.

Morpheus, taking his place by the oars, stared at me in wonder.

"Wherefore dost put on thy wet slippers, lad?"

"Because I don't want to get a splinter."

" 'Tis forwhy he'd not have a splinter. He'd not have wet feet, nor a splinter neither. Yet would he sooner not have a splinter, than have dry feet, forwhy he doth shod himself in wet slippers, that he may not have a splinter. But tell me, sweet hedonist; tell innocent and wondering Morpheus: didst not leave the belly o' the whale wi' thy slippers in thy lap?"

"That was because the boat had water in it." "Speak no more; 'tis more than immortality can understand." Reaching into his pocket, he removed his pipe and stuck it between his teeth.

The pumps began working loudly, and soon a gentle flood of water began to slide along the floor. Slowly we rose in our boat, which turned in lazy circles; Morpheus made no attempt to row. On the wall opposite the dimlit pumps I saw the outline of a great door, gradually sinking into the dark water. When the level of the water was well above the door, the pumps gave a loud grinding sound and stopped. We were no longer rising, and I looked across the dark lake, lit here and there by floating cubes.

Under the water I heard a muffled roar, which I recognized as the opening of the great door. Again the pumps began, and I gripped the side of the boat, anticipating turbulence. Nothing happened. Soon I became aware that we were rising slowly; evidently the water was rushing in faster than the banging pumps could get rid of it. I gazed up, but could see only darkness. When I lowered my eyes I saw the great dark hump rising beside us.

"Down, lad! Down i' the boat!" I remained motionless on my seat, one hand gripping the gunwale and one the thwart. "Down, I say!"

Morpheus seized the oars and began rowing furiously toward the clifflike shape. I could feel a current sweeping us toward him, as if he were sucking us in; the lower jaw had dropped, leaving a low lintel of upper jaw. Morpheus looked quickly over his shoulder, jerked one oar, cried "Down!" —and bending low I passed under the bony ridge a foot above my head. I felt us rushing into blackness, round and round we turned, suddenly we broke free and rushed away in a roaring churning stream. Water splashed against my face, streamed from my cheeks; for a moment I almost tumbled from the boat. Then a quietness came over things; we had come out into the still pool.

I looked down at the boat and saw that I was sitting in water up to my calves. Morpheus, clenching his pipe, rowed to the bed. The bowl of his pipe was filled with water. When he bent his head forward, water poured from his hatbrim.

We beached the boat on the floating platform. Morpheus shook out his derby, placed it back on his head, and marched to the division of the curtains. With one hand he swept aside a curtain, while with the other he removed his pipe and spilled the water from it. I removed my soaked slippers, wrung out the hem of my dripping robe, and climbed the steps onto the dry, soft bed, where I stood curling my wet toes in the velvet blanket. An oil lamp still burned on the bookshelves at the head of the bed; the air was warm. I saw my journal lying peacefully beside my clothes.

Morpheus climbed heavily onto the bed and strode dripping to his row of casks at the bed's head. Snatching up a wooden cup he held it beneath a cask and turned on the spigot. He lifted the cup to his mouth and flung back his head while the wine trickled from the tap onto the bed. He thrust the cup under again.

When I came up to him he had drunk off three cups and stood holding out the cup to me. Water streamed along his cheeks and dripped from his robe onto the bed. Beside my journal I saw my watch. Holding my wet slippers in one hand, I took the cup in the other and drank deep. When I lowered the cup I saw Morpheus gazing at me in curiosity.

"Tell me, lad. Wherefore didst put thy life at risk, staying upright i' the boat?"

"Til tell thee, Morph, an thou rebuke me not. 'Twas forwhy it was wet i' the boat."

Morpheus stared at me without expression. He continued to gaze blankly at me as I drank again. Lowering my cup, I felt a faint ripple pass through me; and all at once I burst into wild laughter. Water dripped from my slippers, my robe, my hair; tears streamed from my eyes, mingling with the wetness on my cheeks; and placing the cup on a shelf I hugged my ribs as I laughed and laughed, while dripping

Morpheus, removing a soaked handkerchief from his pocket, carefully wiped the bowl of his pipe. He stood staring at me without a word as my laughter slowly exhausted itself.

"Give me thy word as a man," said Morpheus, "that when I order thee to get down i' the boat, thou wilt obey."

"Aye, Morph, that I promise."

" 'Tis well. Now tell me, lad, hath my wine too much o' wetness for thee?"

"Nay, Morph; for though 'tis wet, yet 'tis dry."

"Then wet thy whistle, lad, and dry thy nose, lest thou die o' the drought or sneeze thyself into an early grave. Wet i' the boat—wet i' the boat—woo't save thy life?—nay, 'tis wet i' the boat."

Morpheus tossed me a pillowcase, filled a second cup with wine, and flung himself down against the pillows. He filled his pipe from the wooden box of tobacco and lit up. I placed my dripping robe beside my drying one, rubbed myself carefully dry with the pillowcase, and pulled back an edge of bedspread, some twenty feet from Morpheus. "Now lad," said he, puffing away, but already I had crawled under the spread, already my chest rose and fell slowly.

11. In Which We Reach Land, and Make a Surprising Discovery

I woke to a sharp smell of smoke and cooking, and saw at a glance that Morpheus was not in the bed. Quickly I rose and pulled on my damp pants, which were soaked through only at the leg-bottoms. Draping a black pillowcase shawl-like about my bare shoulders, I strode to the division of the curtains and stepped outside. At the far corner of the wet wooden platform I saw Morpheus in robe and derby, squatting over a low fire. I smelled roasting fish.

" 'Sdeath, lad," he said as I came up to him, "I nowise intended, to make thee walk on wetness; but would ha' served thee i' thy bed, as befits thy lordship."

"Now Morph," said I, squatting beside the wood fire, "tell me how you've wrought this miracle."

"Why, though a god I be, yet have I read thy Hume, and am grown skeptical of miracles. For which is more probable, lad: that Morpheus did turn wine into fish, by touching his finger t' the rim o' this cup, or that he wi' stick and string did raise 'em wriggling out of yond pool? Aye, here be many fishes, which swallowed by Leviathan do thrive i' the whaley waterways; and I do fish 'em out, and eat 'em,

when I do pass this way. But here, this crisp and crackly lad's for thee. Only, choke not on the bones."

An open penknife lay on the wet platform by the fire. The fish had been cleaned and gutted, and lay roasting in halves. Morpheus lifted a slice onto a plate and handed it to me; I looked at it hungrily and uneasily. It still had a tail, though no head.

"What sort of fish is it, Morph?"

" 'Sdeath, 'tis whalebelly fish; 'tis Morphean fish; 'tis hooked fish; roasted fish; bedfish; chamberfish; I know not what a devil fish it may be. Call it Hausmanfish, forwhy 'tis no longer wet. Nay, eat not the fish, forwhy it hath no name."

I looked doubtfully at the dark pool, and the unknown fish; but the smell of roasted fishmeat rose so powerfully that I could no longer resist, and dismissing illness and death with a shrug I tasted it eagerly.

" 'Tis an excellent sweet fish, Morph; and I do name it humefish, forwhy it doth seem a miracle, yet doth it have an explanation."

"Then thine be humefish, and mine berkeleyfish, forwhy he hath this property: that when I see him no longer, then is he not there."

With this he lifted the fish from the fire and dropped it on a plate. As we ate our philosophical fish I looked with interest at the fire, which burned in a shallow pit sunk in the floor of the platform. The base and sides of the pit were stone. Nearby sat a flat stone slab with an iron ring in it.

When we had finished our fish and wine we lit our pipes and sat smoking on the platform, which at this end was nearly dry. Morpheus smoked his short black pipe and I the old pipe I had found in the dry robe. After a while he knocked out his pipe against the side of the pit. He picked up the heavy lid by the ring and set it carefully in place over the smoldering pit.

"Now lad, old Morph hath a touch o' work to do; yet it being watery labor, do thou go inside, and rest thee, till the task be done."

"Nope; uh uh; no way. Nay, Morph, I'll stay wi' thee; for though thou do mock at me, forwhy I would be dry, yet forget not, I am one who hath gone down beneath the sea."

I followed Morpheus to the other end of the platform, where we emptied our boat of water and set forth. Morpheus rowed slowly about the lake; it was my task to pick up driftwood and put it in the boat. I found several small branches with the leaves still on them; a bit of plank with a rusty nail through it; and a twist of wood worn so smooth that it looked like wet ivory. With our haul of wet wood we rowed back to the bed and dragged our boat onto the wet platform. We carried the dripping wood into the bed and placed it on the spread to dry. Slapping water from his hands, Morpheus gazed with satisfaction at his collection of firewood; then giving a little bow, he

swept out an arm toward the head of the bed. Together we strolled to the pillows, where flinging himself down Morpheus set about filling his pipe. I sat down nearby, beside my two wet robes and damp shirt, and for a while we smoked in silence.

"Art rested, lad?"

"Aye, Morph; and well fed, too."

" 'Tis well. Now lad, while thou didst sleep, Leviathan did upward glide; and seeing those branches, whereon the leaves be fresh, Morpheus doth infer that we be a-swim amongst leafy isles. Wherefore methinks 'tis fitting that we seek land, if thou art rested, and well fed."

"Aye, Morph; and yet I like sitting in this sheltered place, yawning and talking, the way we used to do."

"Why, there's no end of yawning and talking, lad. 'Tis a trick can be played elsewhere than in the belly of a whale. But if thou be weary —"

"Nay, not weary; but a shade melancholical. For seeing this bed hath put me in mind o' thy first and proper bed, wherefrom we set forth, I know not when; making me to remember, all that I've seen and done, here in thy realm; seeking I know not what, I know not why." And with this I gave a loud sigh.

" 'Sdeath!" cried Morpheus, "to be stricken in the melancholy, and not a god! There be many a cure for that ill, as cut thy throat, play at bauble-in-a-haystack with a willing wench, apply horseleeches, purge thyself wi' syrup of hellebore, walk out into the air, go riding, shooting, hawking, fowling, fishing, play at tennis, bowls, chess, cards, see a play, go to church, chew on herbs, as bay leaves, wormwood, spikenard, pennyroyal, rue, eat roots, as angelica, calamus aromaticus, gentian, condite ginger, provoke urine, stools, vomit, build a fence, sleep, drink, pray, fast, flagellate thyself, seek mirthful company, learn French, Dutch, Egyptian, think on the misfortunes of friends, take up a useful trade, sweep thy room, stare at thy big toe, cut off thy cods, travel to unknown parts, scribble sonnets, epics, tragedies, go to sea, study prosody, gem-cutting, Christian heresies, the history of artillery, play the flageolet, sing glees, catches, dumps, dance the fandango, fall in love, forswear the flesh, curse thy wife. An these remedies suffice not, then i' sooth thou hast a touch o' the melancholy but fret not, 'twill pass. Come, thou reluctant Jonah: 'tis a dank bed, though soft."

Irritated at my own melancholy I rose, strapped on my watch, thrust the old pipe back into the pocket of the second robe, and briskly readied myself for departure. I searched for something in which to carry my damp shirt, and at last stuffed it into the nearly dry upper sleeve of my original Morphean robe. This being too wet for me to carry in my lap, I rolled it up and brought it out to the boat. From one sack of provisions came a smell of saltwater, roots, and soggy bread. I

removed the ruined bread, reluctantly thrust in the wet robe, and returned for the box of tobacco. But at once I was confronted with the problem of my journal. Even if the sack had been dry I would not have allowed my journal to be separated from myself; but now I had no shirt or robe to protect it with. I considered removing my shirt from the sack, wearing it despite its dampness, and placing the journal between my shirt and stomach; and I was pondering this unsatisfactory solution when Morpheus, seeing my perplexity, flung me a dry pillowcase and told me to wrap up my history in a symbol of slumber.

When I had loaded the tobacco box into the sack I returned to the bed for a final check. The wet driftwood sat in dark water-patches at the foot of the bed, the wet robe and damp pillowcase lay spread out at the head. My watch was on my wrist. Morpheus tossed off a final cup of wine and lit up his pipe. He straightened his hat, wrung out his sleeves, and blew out the light. In the moment before the flame went out I saw my bare toes, and suddenly remembered my wet slippers.

When I stepped through the curtains I saw Morpheus standing in his soaked robe, urinating loudly into the pool.

“ ‘Sdeath, Morph. ‘Tis thy supper.”

“ ‘Tis but a salt sauce for the fish. Yet think not savage Morpheus doth love to sup on’s own piss: for the waters o’ this lake, like unto a woman’s will, be continually changing. Ah, lad, there’s naught to compare wi’ the pissing pleasure; for that rival pleasure once ended, there’s no help, one must hearken t’ the wench, and talk to her; yet the pissing pleasure requireth no partner. Being wenchless, ‘tis a pleasure purer than that other, and uncondemned by the Church Fathers, nor ill spake of i’ the Holy Book. Now of all pissing pleasures, none can compare wi’ this of pissing i’ the belly of a whale.”

The wine having worked its effect, I felt my own need sharp in me; and walking in watery slippers to one side of the wet platform, and tucking my journal, wrapped in a black pillowcase, under my arm, I added my own salt arc to the waters of the whale.

This done, we loaded the two sacks into the boat, pushed the boat into the water, and were about to shove off when I cried, “Wait!” Morpheus stared in surprise as I sprang from the boat, hurried clumsily along the slippery platform, and entered the dark bed. I stumbled through pitch darkness to the head of the bed, where I felt the wet robe; and reaching into a pocket, I removed the soaked piece of paper on which Morpheus had sketched the sinking of Atlantis.

I returned to the boat and we set forth across the lake. While Morpheus rowed, I held my journal in my lap and tossed bits of soggy bread to the fishes, who smacked them up noisily. We soon left the lake, and passing through the long and narrow water-tunnel we came

into the great mouth.

We rowed in and out among the fleshy islands, stopping in a central pool. There Morpheus removed an oar and thrust it hard against the mouth-bottom. "Down i' the boat," he said, somewhat to my surprise, for he had not ordered me down at the time of the first spewing-out. Sitting on a wet hank of rope, and clutching the thwart, I watched the water coming in between the great curving teeth. As the lower jaw dropped, a horseshoe-shaped waterfall began pouring down between the spaces in the tooth wall. The water struck our boat and Morpheus began rowing furiously toward the sinking teeth. This time the dangerous upper jaw was well above our heads, but as we passed through we rose suddenly on an unexpected wave; Morpheus struck his head against the bony upper ledge and was flung forward onto the floor of the boat. A wave dashed over the side, the boat plunged and rose, desperately I clung to the thwart. I looked up. High overhead stretched a clear dark sky, with twinkling star-fires and a round white moon.

Morpheus, clinging to a single oar, rose to his knees and shook his fist. "Thou damn'd fish! May the toothache plague thee!" He rubbed his head. " 'Twas my hat saved me from a cracked skull, lad. Yet where is he now? Gone i' the belly o' the plaguy whale. My hat! My hat! What need hath a fish of a hat?"

"To keep him from getting wet. But look, Morph. Is this yours?"

I handed him the hat, which had tumbled into my lap when he fell.

"Ah, lad, lad: thou art the sweetest lad that e'er was spewed forth from a whale. Why, thou'rt twice Jonah; for he did come forth but once, like an egg. Doth it not become me, lad? Will not the wenches melt?"

Resuming his seat, he placed the hat on his head at a rakish angle and turned his head from side to side. "Aye, Morph; yet where's the second oar?"

" 'Tis gone, lad; Leviathan hath need of a toothbrush. Methinks the brim had not this bend in her, ere she grappled with a whale."

"And so we're doomed to row in circles, round and round, for all eternity —"

"Why, so it may be, lad, an it please thee; but as for me, I would have supper on yond leafy isle."

I turned to see an island in the near distance, its crest of trees silhouetted against the starry night sky.

"Now lad, take thou this common oar, which wi' much use hath to me grown tedious, and sit thee down here at the rowlock, the while I take up this leafy branch, and paddle beside thee. What say'st thou, lad? Had my brim such a bend in her, ere she battled Leviathan?"

The rowing went more smoothly than I had imagined possible, helped in part by the tide. Despite my misgivings about having only a single oar, which made the future uncertain, I was so relieved to be near an island, and so pleased to see a long stretch of beach suitable for landing, that my spirits were high as we rowed to shore. The tide carried us directly to the sand, and it was a matter of moments before we had stepped from the boat and dragged it onto the beach. The narrow shore led to a stand of trees, behind which rose a low rocky cliff topped by woods.

"Now Morph," I said, sitting down on the gunwale, "I don't mean to carp, or seem to flounder, but I'm soaked to the skin and have no dry clothes. If we could maybe start a fire—"

"Aye, lad; yet would I perch and breathe awhile, admiring the starry sky."

" 'Tis a clear night, Morph; thy star-fires do glimmer like earth-stars; aye, and the moon doth shine, which methinks ere this hath been hid by clouds. Then here we be, two Crusoes on an ocean isle—but what—"

I had felt a tremor in the ground. The island began to rush forward through the water.

"Quick, lad: she moveth. We must drag the boat to the base o' the cliff, and lash her to a tree."

Angrily I pulled the boat deep within the trees, and fastened a wet rope in a clove-hitch about a trunk. I sat sullenly on the gunwale, crossing my arms over my wet chest.

"Wherefore dost sulk, lad?"

"Because I'm tired, Morph. Tired of whales, and tired of oceans. And now this island, taking us god knows where—"

"Why, put thy mind at rest, lad: for 'tis a manner o' rowing much to my liking."

Angry at his relentless raillery, I sat tight-lipped and frowning, brooding over our fate. Even if we escaped from the moving island, we could look forward to nothing better than a drifting and hopeless sea-life, confined to a one-oared boat with a diminishing supply of food, and at the mercy of darkness, sea monsters, and unknown enemies, to say nothing of ocean storms. If, on the other hand, we remained on the island, we could look forward at best to a cramped and monotonous life of mean subsistence, and quite possibly to a precarious life in which we were prey to the attacks of wild animals or savage natives. It occurred to me that I was perhaps being unduly pessimistic. But at the same time I wondered whether my capacity to imagine misfortune had itself been impaired by my present condition of irritable dejection, so that things might be far worse than at the moment I was able to conceive them to be. In my gloom I had, for instance, entirely forgotten

that my clothes were wet, nor had I noticed a small and burning blister which had formed on my right palm from my recent struggle at rowing. As I bent to examine the blister I became aware of a slight change in the motion of the island, as if an obstruction had given way. It seemed to me that the ground had tilted somewhat. A cool breeze blew. I was unable to see through the trees, and a sudden curiosity came over me to look at the shore.

"Steady, lad," said Morpheus, seizing my arm as with difficulty I made my way through the sloping grove. I stopped in confusion: I could not see the ocean. Clutching a thick branch while Morpheus held my arm, I stepped forward to the edge of the trees and saw clearly the strip of sandy beach. It ended in black air. Far below, I saw the faintly gleaming dark sea. We were moving through the night sky, higher and higher.

"Aye, lad: a flying isle. But come away, old Morph doth quake in's slippers for fear thou'lt fall."

"Where are we going?" I asked calmly, looking down at the ocean and up at the stars.

"Wheresoe'er the isle doth will to go. Yet methinks 'tis not impossible we do voyage to the moon. Come away, lad, In sooth 'tis dangerous, here at the island's edge."

"But," I said suddenly, clinging to my branch and staring at the round white moon, "how can it be the moon?"

IX. The Tale of a Voyage to the Moon



1. Of the Two Moons

“WHY, ‘tis the Morphean moon; which is to say, not thy mundane moon, but mine unearthly and most celeste sphere. For like as thy Upper Ocean, or teapot sea, doth as ‘twere chime wi’ the mighty waters o’ the realm below: so is thy Upper Moon correspondent to the Lower Moon, which though ‘tis called lower, yet methinks ‘tis in all ways higher than thy high but lowly lune. For the scholars o’ thy realm do say, thy unpoetical moon’s but a dusty stone i’ the sky; yet the Morphean moon’s compact of fancy, whereby I would have thee understand, ‘tis an epitome of imagined moons, or thickened ether of dreamed moons. Think’st thou bold Cyrano did stroll upon such an humdrum moon as thine? Think’st thou faithful Astolfo, seeking the lost wits of Orlando, did spur his winged steed to thy paltry pebble? Think’st thou mad Münchhausen did scale’s beanstalk thither, or restless Lucian there anchor his wind-lofted ship? Methinks it doth stretch credulity, to suppose such moon-voyagers did disembark upon thy button. What? Can it be that pale lovers tossing i’ their sheets do turn to thy lump of chalk for comfort? — or sighing poets, racking their brains for a rhyme wi’ June, take fire from thy old tennis ball in the sky? Dost think Diana o’ the forest would deign to dwell i’ the waste and desert places o’ thy cheerless clod o’ clay? Dost think the man i’ the moon wi’s lanthorn and dog would walk in such an ice-wilderness? ‘Sdeath, methinks thy old, cold, and wrinkled moon hath less o’ poetry in her than a withered peach. But turn thee now t’ the Morphean moon, ah, then will thy contracted soul shake her wings and soar. ‘Tis the true moon of lovers, poets, and voyagers. Thither your melancholy and night-wandering lover’s sighs and vows and tears do pass: and collecting in a deep vale, those tears do form a river, those vows bridges, those sighs moon-willows. ‘Tis by the light o’ the Morphean moon Pierrot doth ever woo his Columbine. Under the spell o’ that same moon all true poets be lifted into song: aye, e’en thy prosaical scritch-scratch scribblers may have their moments, an they wander i’ the light o’ the Morphean moon. ‘Tis that same lunelight

doth lure all true voyagers: swaying thy sweet rogue Raleigh to set forth in search of El Dorado, and Sindbad to sail from Baghdad on a day. Aye, 'tis that selfsame upward-drawing moon we sail for now, on island wings. Then be a good lad, and come away fro' the margin o' the wood; lest thy wondering cure thee o' wandering."

2. *Arrival*

Morpheus led me back to the boat, where we discussed what our next steps should be. I was anxious to dry my clothes quickly, for up here the air was cool and a sharp breeze blew, caused no doubt by our motion through the Morphean firmament. Despite the sheltering trees Morpheus insisted that we were still not far enough from the edge for safety, and I agreed to search for a more secure spot, where we might make a fire and rest.

With this in mind we chose from our two sacks a number of provisions and set forth. My robe-pockets full of fruit and my journal tucked under an arm, I clutched two wooden winecups in one hand and two pipes in the other. Ahead of me Morpheus leaned to one side, holding a winekeg on his shoulder; in his free arm he gripped the box of tobacco and Heklo's tinderbox. Swiftly he led me forward along the inner edge of the wood, with the cliff on our left and the shore on our right. Our way was slightly uphill, for the front of the island was tilted upward in flight. We had not gone far when the rocky cliff on our left changed to a tree-grown slope. Morpheus led the way up, and from the crest of the slope we looked down at a shallow valley, bordered all round by cliffs and wooded hillsides.

In the bright moonlight I saw a wondrous sight. At the downward end of the valley lay a small lake, whose waters were thrown up against the downhill bank. The uphill side of the lake was empty, so that I could see half the gleaming lake-bottom. It was as if I were looking at a cup of water tipped far to one side. The water that had overflowed lay sheeted against the base of a long hill. Here and there I saw wet, empty stream-beds, whose waters had evidently been thrown into the lake or back against the hill. It occurred to me that water unbounded by hills must have been thrown from the island, and Morpheus explained that falling water from flying islands was a common nuisance in these parts, though far less dangerous than falling rocks, branches, and animals.

We descended into the valley. At the bottom we crossed a muddy stream-bed and came to a field of scrub and rock, where we determined to build a fire. Morpheus set down the keg, filled a cup, and raised it to the stars.

"Ad astra per aspera, lad. Which plain-Englised doth say: To the stars wi' scars. Oof. My back's cracked in half."

"To the stars with aspirin," I said, taking the cup from him and raising it high.

The great tinderbox was half full of water. Morpheus prepared new tinder from bits of bark and dried leaf, and struck sparks onto it with the flint and steel. He lay down on his stomach and with much muttering and cursing managed to blow the sparks into a flame. I meanwhile prepared a circle of stones, in the middle of which I placed dry leaves and light kindling. We soon had a blazing fire. Removing my soaked robe, shirt, and pants, I wrung them out and laid them on the ground on three sides of the fire, which blew toward the downhill side in the wind of our ascent. I placed my slippers closer to the flames, upon the circle of stones, and laid my wet watch inside a slipper. Then I crouched naked at the side of the fire and rubbed my body dry with my palms. At the lower end of the valley the sheet of water glimmered at the base of the hill.

Dismissing my warnings with a disdainful shrug, Morpheus laid his robe carelessly on the ground at the downhill side of the fire. He next broke off two sturdy bush-branches and thrust them into the ground on both sides of his robe.. Very carefully he hung his ragged boxer shorts on one and his derby on the other.

Morpheus opened the tobacco box, plunged his fist in, and brought up a tangled handful. He examined it in the firelight. "Lad, 'tis like a weeping whore: damp above and dry below. Twill serve."

"Like Mount Atlantis," I said.

We filled our pipes and lit up, crouching naked as savages before the fire. From my wet robe I removed a piece of fruit.

"Well, Morph, I grant it's nothing to be swallowed by a whale, and belched out under the sea, and let down in a tub to Atlantis. But this flying isle's a bit out of the common way."

"Why, how so, lad? These soarers be plentiful and pestiferous as flies. A god can scarce set foot in's own ocean ere he's aloft on some wretched piece o' flying sod. 'Tis true they most oft do frisk about their own waters, hopping each o'er the other, and fluttering here and there; yet can they outsoar eagles, and outrace the wind."

"You've warned me about floating islands. I thought it was one of those, the way it went along the water."

"Why, a man may crawl upon the ground, yet is he not a dog. These flying isles lift not straight fro' the waves, but rush forward ere they rise; and though therein they may seem floaters, yet have they naught in common wi' those wave-bound isles. For these fliers be good-natured lads, wanting that hostile and pursuing nature which is the curse o' floaters: save when attacked, at what time they grow all

dragon. 'Tis said that on a day Pegasus—hast heard the name, lad?—did meet aloft with one o' these flying isles, and all carelessly did brush his hoof against him; whereupon the enraged isle pursuing him through the heavens, did knock against a wing, which injured did droop; and flying unsteadily, the winged horse did strike his heel against Mount Helicon, whereat the fount of Hippocrene came gushing forth. For some say, in those days there were flying isles i' the waters o' thy realm; yet did the race perish above, forwhy thy kind did come to deny 'em."

"It seems a nobler race of isle than the floating kind—yes, you could say a spiritual sort of isle, striving upward. But I'm a little puzzled by their habits. You say they can outsoar eagles, and outrace the wind; and here we are, on the way to the Morpheap moon; yet yours is a circumscribed heaven, bounded by a roof of stone. How can we soar in such a hemmed-in firmament?"

"Thy brain is bounded by thy brainpan: yet can it not soar? 'Sdeath, dost think thy knick-knack heaven a match for the Morpheap firmament? Thy heaven to mine is as a chamberpot to an ocean, a mush-rump to a forest, an alphabet to a philosophy; nay, there's no compare, forwhy the Morpheap heaven's vast as the imagining of all those that have dreamed a firmament. Look upward, lad: see'st thou a bound to the Morpheap night?"

I looked upward and saw the brilliant moon, and a night sky of stars, and darkness stretching back and back. The night, the tobacco, the fire-warmth, the motion of the isle, all lulled me, till my eyes half-closed, and my head hung down; and apologizing to Morpheus, and turning my pants and shirt on the stones, I spread my damp yet fire-warmed robe on the ground, lay down with my head on the upslope, and was soon asleep.

I woke in a blaze of moonlight. Beside the fire Morpheus lay in his robe, his derby tipped over his eyes. His head leaned against the small keg and on his stomach he clasped a wooden cup. The second cup lay on its side in the grass beside him.

I turned to look at the front hills and was startled to see above them an immense semicircle of moon, stretching away on both sides and looming high above. Brilliant moonlight lit the valley and threw sharp shadows. Despite its closeness the moon lacked greater detail; it seemed all a blaze of whiteness, with bluish shadows.

I felt my clothes. The shirt and pants were warm and nearly dry, except for a touch of dampness at collar and knee; the robe was still wet along the sleeves. I pulled on my pants and shirt, strapped on my watch, stepped into my still-damp slippers; and wringing out the robe, I laid it across the warmed stones and glanced at Morpheus. The hand grasping the cup raised as if in salute.

"Get up, Morph—I thought you were asleep. This splendid moon—aye, and please note, old wordwatcher, that I use the word 'splendid' with full etymological awareness—yes, this splendid, splendiferous moon—"

" 'Tis that hath flattened me, lad; for like as a bat, a thief, or a pocky wench, so sweet Morpheus is one who doth dote on darkness. 'Slid, this lunelight hath near blinded me. It doth weigh on my lids like coins."

He sat up sullenly and set the derby low on his forehead, narrowing his eyes and twisting his lips into a grimace. Slowly raising his cup he said: "Queen and huntress, chaste and fair." He brought the cup to his mouth, threw back his head, and drank deep. He coughed suddenly, bending forward and wiping his arm across his lips. He said:

"O it wasn't the cough
That carried him off
But the coffin they carried him off in."

He drank again, scowled at the moon, and stared suddenly at me, as if noticing me for the first time. He beamed. "Why, lad, 'tis thee. Methought 'twas but a vision o' the moon, called up in mine disturbed and o'erwrought fancy." Filling the second cup at the keg, he held it out to me. I dismissed it with an impatient shrug.

Morpheus looked at me with grave concern. "Art faint, lad? Dost feel a lightness?"

"Nay, Morph, leave off thy jesting—'tis thy moon doth draw me."

" 'Tis my moon doth damn me: for I would sleep, and cannot. Thou didst snore away like a very Endymion. The lad hears me not. Nay, there's no help for't. Come, sweet mooncalf: wouldst climb yond hill?"

Rising with a yawn, Morpheus led me along the valley to the forward hills. We climbed a wooded slope, checkered toward the top with moonlight and shadow, and entered a small wood on the crest. When we stepped from the trees I stopped in amazement. I saw the great round moon, vast as a white lake, spread out in the blackness before me—it seemed to fill the entire sky. It was so bright that I could not look at it for more than a few moments. In the brilliant glow I saw clearly the sandy foreshore of the island, the stones on the beach, a twisting bush-branch with three black leaves. The luminous shore ended abruptly in blackness.

Thrilled and oppressed by the violence of that brightness, I was not unhappy to return to the shelter of the valley.

Morpheus lay down and tipped his hat over his eyes while I, unable to sit calmly, fussed with my robe, holding it up before the fire

and turning it from side to side. I kept my back to the moon but glanced helplessly over my shoulder, startled every time to see the Morphean moon vast and white-blazing there. In the lower portion of the upward-slanted valley I saw the tipped lake clearly, with its flung-back waters. Even as I moved restlessly about I had the sense of increasing brightness. It was if I were being drawn into a white radiance.

I flung myself to the earth, lit my pipe, knocked it out impatiently, sprang up and walked about, lay down and closed my eyes, sat up and arranged my robe. I glanced at my watch, which glowed like a little moon. The composure of Morpheus exasperated me; he seemed to mock me with calmness.

"'Sdeath," said he, "thou dost rush about like a stung cow."

"And thou dost lie a-lump there like a butchered bull. 'Slife, 'tis the moon, Morph. 'Tis the moon."

"Methinks thou'rt become lune-mad, lad; a very moonatic."

"Better than luning about like a — what's this? What's this?"

I had been looking toward the lower valley, and as I spoke I saw the sheet of flung-back water at the base of the long hill begin flowing toward us. The slanted water in the cup of the lake fell and flattened. Water from the hill poured into the lake and spilled backward over the fields and empty stream-beds. Swiftly a darkness came over things. When I looked over my shoulder I saw an empty sky: the moon had vanished, though a glow rose from behind the black, front hills. I looked about in confusion and alarm.

"'Tis beneath us, lad." Morpheus was sitting up, tamping down tobacco in his pipe.

"Beneath us?" And again I looked about, as if the heavy moon might have fallen like a meteorite into the valley.

"Sit thee down, lad: 'tis no time for standing, an thou value thy nose. Aye, that's good. Light up thy pipe. Thou who hast dallied in Atlantis, thou who hast lived among giants: calm thyself, 'tis but a voyage t' the moon."

Over the dark cliffs a white peak rose. I looked eagerly about; all around the island, white peaks thrust up. Some rushed backward, while others, more distant, moved slowly, dreamily by. Morpheus, opening his mouth, emitted a large and slow-turning smoke ring. Soon the white peaks ceased to appear, and over the hills and cliffs of the island I saw only empty sky — a darkness lit by a glow.

A moment later, the ground trembled slightly.

"What's that?" I asked sharply.

Morpheus raised his eyebrows, as if surprised by my question, and removed his pipe. "Why, lad," he began, frowning as if in preparation for an intricate explanation, but I knew that we had

landed.

3. The White Rock

Tying my damp robe carefully about me, and holding my journal away from my side, I followed Morpheus up the slope to the top of the ridge. There I looked out on a barren white landscape stretching dully away. On the flat white plain I saw nothing but a scattering of white rocks, which cast jetblack shadows. I had had no very precise expectation; but that desolate white wasteland was a sharp disappointment. Beside Morpheus I made my way down the wooded hill, passed through the stand of trees, and came to the sandy shore. But now a problem arose, which I had failed to anticipate.

It had never occurred to me to imagine the portion of island concealed by the Morphean Ocean. A crooked line of shells and seaweed marked the limit of exposed shore. Beyond the dry sand began the wet, darker sand, which continued in a sharp downward slope of perhaps ten paces. At that point the island ended in a sheer cliff some twenty feet high. The base of the cliff swept out; on the rocky shelf lay a jumble of wet boulders.

Morpheus led me to within a few feet of the cliff-edge but drew me quickly back to the line of seaweed, for our footing was treacherous in the sloping sliding sand. I saw no way to leave the island. Even if we discovered a place where the cliff dropped straight to the surface of the moon, instead of sloping outward into a dangerous rock-strewn ledge, and even if I were willing to risk jumping from a sandy height onto unseen ground, Morpheus himself was far too fat for such exertions. Moreover, the problem of climbing back to the top of the island would remain. It therefore appeared that we were stranded on an island on the ocean of the moon. I turned with exasperation to Morpheus, who tilted his hat at a rakish angle, stuck his thumbs in his lapels, and began strolling along the dry sand, beside the crooked line of seaweed.

The dry beach ran on for more than half the length of the island, ending abruptly in a wood. The trees grew down to the wet sand. At the edge of the wood Morpheus turned to me. "Sit thee down, lad, and await my soon return. Speak not wi' passing strangers; accept no sugar-drops." He tugged down the brim of his hat and strode jauntily into the trees. A while later he returned, carrying over his shoulder a hank of rope from the boat.

"A boat i' the wood! 'Tis a miracle."

He tied the sturdy rope around a thick trunk and led it out to the cliff. It hung over by some dozen feet. " 'Tis not so long as immortality,

nor so strong as the tongue of a scolding wife; but 'twill serve. Ease thyself down; crack not thy scone through eagerness; but exercise prudence, as in all things. Old Morph will steady thee."

He sat down on the sandy shore between the tree and cliff, carefully adjusted his hat, and emitted a slow-swirling smoke ring.

I thrust the bottom portion of my journal into the front of my pants and tied the rope tightly across it. Clinging to the rope, I advanced carefully to the cliff-edge. There I turned my back to the moon, lowered myself onto my stomach, and let myself slowly down. My right slipper fell off as I struggled for a foothold, but otherwise the descent was without incident. When I reached the end of the rope I had a drop of several feet, toward the rocks of the outsweeping base; and I dropped down with ease onto a flat wet boulder. I felt the wetness through my sock. Removing my journal, and fetching my slipper from a crevice, I made my way down the slippery rocks onto the surface of the Morphean moon.

The white ground was firm and springy. I bent down and saw with surprise that I was walking on a thick matting of tangled white grass, whose long blades grew sideways and interwove tightly. What I had taken to be a desert appeared to be a vast pasture, littered with large, odd-shaped white rocks. I looked up at the island, which towered over me, and saw the slippered foot of Morpheus reaching over the cliff. It struck me that I was standing on the Morphean moon, and an exhilaration came over me. Impatiently I watched Morpheus as he slowly made his way down the rope; for a while he swayed grotesquely, like a piano being lowered from a third-story apartment. Again I bent over and felt the thick matting of moon-grass. Morpheus, muttering a curse, dropped heavily but cleanly onto a boulder. His hat tumbled off and he bent to search for it. I watched with exasperation as he picked up his hat, dusted it with his sleeve, set it carefully on his head, sucked at his pipe, thrust his thumbs into his lapels, and stepped onto the next boulder. He stood looking this way and that as if he were crossing a busy street. Unable to endure it for another second, I turned away and strode across the moon-meadow to one of the curious rock formations that lay some hundred yards from our island. The rock was highly irregular in shape and put me in mind of a little iceberg, or of a miniature mountain range. It consisted of four or five jagged peaks, the tallest of which was as high as my neck. I climbed onto a little plateau between two peaks, placed my journal on a flat ledge, and had begun to examine the smooth and strangely soft surface when Morpheus called out: "Quick, lad. Come down."

"But Morph," I protested, and felt something shift beneath me. All at once I felt myself lifted into the air. I saw the great white wings unfold, I snatched at my journal as it tumbled to the ground,

desperately I clung to the ridge of back; and down below, Morpheus was shouting up at me from the rocks, but his cries were lost in a snowy rush of wings.

4. The Adventure Continued

The great bird flew high over the white meadow, now and then sweeping lazily down to within eight or ten feet of the ground before rising again. I thought at such times of leaping to safety, but terror of injury held me back; and as we swooped down I clung all the harder to my perilous seat. The bird had triple-jointed wings about twelve feet long, and a slender muscular neck that I encircled with my arms while lying flat and clinging to the bony body with my legs. Though our flight seemed swift, the long wings moved slowly and almost lazily up and down; and despite my continual fear of falling I soon felt nearly safe on my bedlike perch, from which I observed the passing landscape with interest.

The flat white meadow gradually gave way to a furrowed and wrinkled countryside, which at first I took for farmland. The ridges proved to be low white hills, very long and narrow, with shadowy valleys between. Abruptly the hills ended and I found myself in a region of soaring white mountains. The bird flew in and out among great jagged peaks, many of which rose in thin twisting spurs, like gigantic stalagmites—it was as if the surface of the moon had grown dissatisfied, and were straining feverishly upward in writhing sharp shapes. These towering spires rose so thickly that we seemed to be flying through a forest. And a new fear came over me: for whereas at first I had feared being carried off by the moonbird, I now feared being left by him, to die alone among these forbidding white mountaintops. Scarcely had this new unhappiness come over me when the bird began to sweep lazily down, and I saw that I was being carried to the bottom of a deep valley. As we circled down and down, the steep white mountainsides seemed to soar higher and higher, until I had the sense that I was plummeting to the bottom of an immensely deep well. The bird came to rest at the top of a tree in a small white wood; but instead of climbing off I clung fiercely to him, while I looked up at the white cliffs rising as if mockingly on all sides.

The bird remained motionless, and I saw that it now resembled thick, crooked branches. Desperately I debated what to do. Even if the bird carried me from this gloomy valley, he was likely to descend again, perhaps in a more desolate spot. The valley appeared to be fertile, for here were many white trees; I was far better situated than if we had landed atop some rocky crag, or in an arid, stony valley. It was

not impossible that there were lakes and oceans on the Morphean moon, and next time the bird might land on some desolate island, or even on the water itself. It occurred to me that the creature might be dangerous: when I slid from its back, might it not attack me with its beak and talons? But here, in the white forest, I could take shelter among the trees. Quite apart from these considerations was the danger of flight itself; for although I had managed to cling safely to the bird, there remained always the possibility of losing my grip and falling, either because of a sudden, unexpected motion of the bird, or because of my own increasing tiredness, especially during a long flight in which I would have to exercise continual alertness. For all these reasons it seemed to me that to leave this valley would be foolish to the point of madness. I reproached myself for sitting motionless on the back of a gigantic bird at the top of a tree; and with the sense of escaping from danger in the nick of time, I slid my legs from the back of the branchlike creature to a sturdy white tree-branch, which grew from the upper portion of the trunk.

The moment I released my grip, the bird rose from the tree with a long slow flapping of its triple-jointed wings. I watched it rise higher and higher in slowly widening circles, until I could see it no longer. It came over me that I was utterly alone; that I was trapped forever in a deep and inaccessible valley on the Morphean moon; that by giving way to foolish fear I had deliberately missed my last chance of escape; that perhaps, if only I had been patient, the bird would have carried me back to Morpheus; and that the wood itself, far from serving to shelter me, might well conceal dangerous creatures from whose attacks the sole means of rescue was the back of a bird.

Gloomily revolving these thoughts, I worked my way toward the trunk along a tangle of branches. From the trunk it was not difficult to lower myself branch by branch, until at last I swung down to the white grass, where I looked about tensely, prepared at any moment to climb back into the safety of the tree.

For the first time I noticed that white fruit hung from the branches I had descended. It hung in clusters of three, each fruit about the size of a plum. I saw similar clusters on neighboring trees, and noticed that the trees were evenly spaced. I appeared to be standing in a white orchard. In the spaces between trees I could see only other trees, and I determined to walk straight in any direction, in the hope of making further discoveries.

I had not gone far when I came out of the orchard and found myself standing before a formal garden of white hedges and flowers, which stretched to the steep mountainside. The garden was divided into quarters, with broad straight paths dividing them and small winding paths in each quarter. The long central path was lined with

white trees, whose white-leaved branches intermingled to form an archway. At the crossing of the straight paths stood a circular white bench. The garden was bordered by the orchard on three sides and by the mountain on the fourth.

I followed the central path to the end, and was troubled to find myself directly before the soaring mountainside, which rose nearly straight up. When I looked back I had the forlorn sense that I had passed through a carefully preserved ruin. In confusion and disappointment I turned and began walking along the edge of the garden, which grew to within several feet of the cliff of white stone. I had advanced more than halfway toward the bordering orchard when I noticed a flower lying in the path. As I bent to pick it up I saw in the irregular wall a narrow fissure that I might not otherwise have noticed. The fissure lay between two overlapping planes of white cliff, and was therefore nearly parallel to the edge of garden along which I had been walking. It led back in the direction opposite to my walk, and for lack of any better plan I decided to follow it a short distance.

5. Through the Fissure

The fissure was so narrow that I was forced to enter sideways, but immediately the path widened sufficiently for me to advance straight ahead, holding out both hands and brushing my fingertips along the walls. I walked in a darkness of whiteness toward a less shadowy whiteness some twenty paces ahead. As I emerged from darkness the inner wall abruptly ended, and I found myself standing in a second valley, facing a broad path bordered by high white hedges. At the end of the path lay a garden, in which four tall fountains sent up spires of spray. Beyond the fountains rose a long white building.

I walked along the path toward the garden and soon became aware of a white figure, who appeared to be bent over a bed of flowers and who wore a loose white robe gathered at the waist. I advanced slowly, hoping to attract attention without giving alarm. As I drew nearer I saw that it was a woman, who looked up and at once drew back a step. She addressed me in a language I had never heard, though in a gentle manner that reassured me somewhat. Thinking it better to await a definite sign, I stopped at the entrance to the garden and held up the flower that I had carried from the outer valley. At this she smiled and beckoned me forward.

I saw that she was entirely white, except for her irises, which were vividly black. She spoke again and I held out the flower to her, speaking a few words of English so that she would know I was a creature who had the gift of language. She seemed startled by my alien

words, but quickly gained possession of herself and addressed me again, as if anxious to hear me speak once more. I told her that my name was Carl Hausman, that I had come from the ocean on a flying island, and that I had been carried into this valley by a great bird. She listened with sharp attention, staring intensely at my eyes and lips as if she were attempting to ungarble my nonsense. When I was done she made a sign for me to follow her. I felt that I had gained her trust, although I noticed that she did not offer to take the flower, which I continued to carry.

The villa at the end of the garden was a symmetrical structure consisting of a massive central section of seven stories, flanked by long wings diminishing stepwise. The garden path led directly to the villa, which had no outer stairway or door. Instead an immense flat-topped archway about three stories high led straight through the center to the other side. Within the passageway were beds of white flowers and white graveled paths. The walls to the left and right were pierced by high square entranceways opening onto elaborately furnished rooms.

I followed the white woman into one opening and found myself in a high room, in the center of which was a thick round pillar that reached to the ceiling. She led me straight to the pillar, in which I saw a white door. She opened the door and revealed a circular white bench that ran along the inner wall. Behind her I stepped through the door onto a round floor that tipped slightly beneath me. I sat quickly beside her on the bench; above us the hollow pillar rose into darkness. From the center of the floor rose a thin white pole, extending upward as far as I could see. She closed the door and made a gesture with her hands: she opened one palm, placed the other fist in it, and slowly raised the fist, looking at me as if inquiring whether I understood. Her gesture was obscure to me, but I grasped her meaning a moment later when I saw her move a lever beneath the bench and felt us slowly rising. I noticed that the walls were slightly damp, and from this and other clues I guessed that we were seated on a floating platform, which was being forced upward through the pillar by water entering beneath us.

We ascended in a silence that I found embarrassing, though my hostess appeared to be untroubled and looked at me several times with frank interest. I studied her furtively. Her delicate white hair was combed back and wound thickly over a comb at the back of her slender neck. She looked youthful, yet bore herself with a dignity that made her seem matronly. Her intense moon-whiteness appeared to be uniform, but differing textures were clearly distinguishable: the smooth whiteness of her cheeks was distinct from the velvety whiteness of her full straight eyebrows and the rougher whiteness of her lips—all these in turn differing from the texture of her robe, which made me think of peachskin.

Very gradually we came to a halt. She opened the door and I followed her into a room with many white chairs and sofas scattered about, and great white curtains hanging from tall windows. From here she led me into a long white corridor with rooms on both sides. About halfway along she stopped before a door, knocked twice, and immediately opened it. Behind her I stepped into a small room lined with books, where a man in a white robe sat bent over a desk with his back to a window. He looked up as we entered; he had a short white beard and a sharp-featured intelligent face.

The woman spoke to the man, who looked at me keenly. He rose, stepped forward, and, accepting the flower with a smile, spoke directly to me. I replied in English, to which he listened with amazed attention. He spoke a few words, very slowly, in a questioning tone; he repeated the words several times. I frowned and shook my head vigorously. He then addressed me again, always in a questioning tone, in what may have been several different languages, in response to all of which I frowned and shook my head. The man appeared surprised and disappointed, and despite the kindness of his expression I had the sense that he was somewhat impatient with me. I spoke again in English, and attempted by gesture to explain that I had arrived here on the back of a great bird. The man watched me with severe attention, spoke briefly to the woman, and gestured to me in return. With his hands he described a large circle; then with one hand he indicated one portion of the circle, and pointed to himself; with the other hand he indicated the opposite portion of the circle, and pointed to me. The meaning of this was exasperatingly uncertain to me, although it appeared to have some geographical significance. In turn I made a circle in the air, and pointed to him; I then spread my hands apart far below the circle, indicating a straight line, and pointed at myself. My own gestures appeared to fascinate and bewilder him; and after a further unsatisfactory exchange of gestures he grew thoughtful, staring intensely at me while stroking his short beard slowly with his fingers.

He suddenly pointed at himself and made a noise that bewildered me. It sounded like the letter "t" at the beginning of a word, followed by a "ch" like that in Scottish "loch": "t-ch." He repeated the double sound very slowly and distinctly several times, and I attempted to repeat it; my effort caused a look of delight on the woman's face and on his a look of triumph. She now pointed at herself and likewise made a double sound: a sharp aspiration followed by the same "ch." I promptly repeated the "hhh-ch" to their satisfaction. I then pointed to myself and said "Carl," which proved so difficult for them that I modified it to "ch-ah," which both repeated at once, changing the "ah" to a simple aspiration.

The man and woman spoke briefly, and proceeded to lead me from the study to a small bedchamber nearby. In the doorway the man began to speak vigorously, suddenly caught himself, and appeared to apologize, while I in turn attempted to assure him by smiles and nods that it was perfectly all right. The woman drew back a white spread from the bed and pulled from the open window a white curtain. I stepped to the window and saw below the white garden, the white fountains, the white hedges, and the soaring white cliffside, part of which, I knew, formed an overlapping plane that concealed a narrow passage leading to the valley and orchard beyond.

The man now bowed to me; and gesturing as if to welcome me to the room, or perhaps to the entire moon, he took his leave. The woman asked by gesture whether I wished to sleep, or whether I was hungry. Although I wasn't at all hungry, for I had eaten fruit during my flight to the moon, I made signs as if I were, since I feared the despair that was bound to come over me as soon as I was left alone. She led me back to the hollow pillar; on the circular seat we rode down to the ground floor. We passed through several rooms to an inner garden, where on a round table under a tree stood a bowl of fruit. A male servant, robed in white, carried out a white pitcher and two white glasses, into which he poured a white liquid. I devoured several pieces of fruit, which beneath their rinds had the taste and texture of sweet bread, and drank two glasses of liquid, which seemed to be a very dry, very light wine. A warmth suffused me, and it seemed to me that my fate might have been much worse. Had I not found shelter, food, and welcome, in the mountains of the Morphean moon?

When I had finished eating she pointed to me, laid her cheek on one hand, and closed her eyes. She looked up inquiringly. I shook my head vigorously, pointed to a doorway, and swept out my arm, looking curiously all about. She appeared to understand my meaning and, rising at once, led me from the garden-room through what appeared to be an immense parlor and at last into the high passageway that ran through the center of the villa. I indicated that I would like to follow the passage to the rear of the house. As we proceeded, I noticed that the flowerbeds grew more careless, weeds and prickly bushes sprang up in the gravel, and the path became uncertain. When I stepped through to the back I found myself in a wild, disordered garden, beyond which rose a thick wood, and then a soaring cliffside. As if to emphasize the wildness of the place a high, narrow waterfall came plunging down along the cliff. The rear facade of the villa, although entirely white, bore no resemblance to the front. It was extravagantly uneven, bulging and receding in no discernible pattern, and supplied with irregular rows of odd-shaped windows, as well as gargoyle-like projections, fanciful twisting decorations, and

little turrets or towers attached as if haphazardly to the walls.

We returned to the more orderly and civilized side of the villa, where I examined several rooms; but a tiredness coming over me, perhaps from the wine, I indicated my desire to return to my room and sleep. She led me to the hollow pillar and accompanied me to the upper floor, where at my door she took her leave.

Alone in my room I lay down and at once plunged into dejection. It was as if my earlier hopefulness had been a consequence of upright posture. It seemed to me that my good fortune was entirely delusive; that utter solitude would have been preferable to being a stranger among an alien race; that food and shelter, far from being boons, were actually the sinister means of prolonging a futile and miserable existence at the bottom of the mountains of the moon; that even if I mastered the language of my hosts I had no certainty of leaving the valley; that if I did find my way out, I had little chance of discovering the island, which in any case would probably by then have flown away; that my hosts, although interested in me at the moment, and apparently kindhearted, would certainly tire of me in the long run, and find my presence not a diversion but a nuisance; and that the sole object capable of giving me pleasure, and to some extent reconciling me to my lonely fate, namely, my journal, had fallen in the moon-meadow. These thoughts impressed themselves so deeply on me that my cheerfulness at the garden table a short time ago seemed to me a form of raving; and with a sense of desolation, as if sleep itself were only another form of disappointment, I closed my weary eyes.

6. *Shouts*

I was wakened by excited shouts and the clang of a bell, followed by footsteps in the hall. I flung off my bedclothes and ran to the window, where pushing aside the curtain I looked down at the garden below. The woman and man were standing with their backs to me, gazing up at the steep mountainside. A servant strode back and forth beside them. I hurried from the room, tying my robe tightly about me, and nearly ran down the corridor, passing the scholar's wide-open door and empty study. In my sleepiness and confusion I failed to find the room with the hollow pillar, and rushed from white room to white room in search of a stairway. I appeared to be drifting toward the back of the house, for I noticed that the corridors grew crooked, the doors were of many sizes, the rooms seemed oddly slanted and a-jumble. At last I came to a white stairway with crooked steps. I began to descend but after a while found myself climbing higher and higher. I escaped from the maddening stairway into a twisting corridor, where I

wandered forlorn through rooms with tilted floors and slanted windows; and I feared I would wander forever through that wilderness of chaotic rooms, but catching sight of a plausible stairway I hurried down. I descended flight after flight of white steps, sliding my hand along smooth white banisters, until it seemed all a white mockery, as if stair after grinning stair were springing into existence just ahead of me—the bottom appeared so suddenly that I nearly fell. I hurried through a doorway and wandered through high white halls before coming at last to the central passageway.

When I reached the garden in front of the house I found my hosts standing motionless on a path, staring up with their heads bent back. I looked up but could see only soaring white cliffs and, immeasurably high above, a space of black and starlit sky. As I strained to see, I noticed a small white speck moving across the black and vanishing against the whiteness of the cliffs, only to appear again. After a time I made out what seemed to be a tiny white bird. My burst of excitement was at once checked by doubt: if the bird had indeed come back for me, how did I know that it would lead me where I wanted to go? Perhaps the man and woman were so overjoyed at the prospect of my departure that they had failed to consider the many dangers of such a flight. Straining to see, I was struck by the height and steepness of the surrounding cliffs, which seemed to stretch infinitely above.

The bird was so high that I could scarcely make out its motion, though after a while I seemed to detect the long slow circles of its flight. It appeared to be going lazily round and round, to no purpose. But in time I saw that it was gradually descending, and as it circled down and down I was able to see the motions of its white, extended wings. To my surprise, the bird appeared to have a tuft of black feathers. As it came closer I stared intensely at the odd black feathers, and I began to have the sense that something was awry, something that would become clearer at any moment—and all at once a tremor of excitement came over me, I felt my throat go dry, and I pointed excitedly at the bird, as if only now I had noticed it. Slowly the great bird circled down, while Morpheus, clinging to its back, held down his derby with one hand. The bird appeared to hesitate before making decisively for one of the white ornamental hedges that bordered the path beyond the garden.

I ran through the garden to the path. The thick white hedge rose about five feet higher than my head, and the great bird, perched at the top, seemed to stretch up another ten feet. Morpheus sat on the slope of the upper back, and was therefore some fifteen feet above me. He gripped a short black pipe in his teeth.

He removed the pipe, frowned at it, tapped the bowl with a finger, and stuck the pipe back in his mouth. He removed it again and gazed

dolefully down at me. "She doth not draw well, lad." He then turned to the man and woman, who had come up beside me, and addressed them in their language. An animated conversation took place, during which Morpheus remained seated on the bird and the servant hurried back to the house. I gathered that they were discussing how Morpheus should descend from his perch; apparently the hedge could not support his direct weight. At length the servant came with a ladder and leaned it up against the hedge. Morpheus made his way nimbly down the back of the bird, which swayed slightly on its tremulous support; at last he set foot on the ladder and made his way down. On the ground he embraced me, saying my wicked ways would drive him to drink; and reaching into his robe, he removed my journal, remarking that I had been growing somedeal careless of late.

There was a sudden motion above, and I looked up to see the great bird rise with a white lifting of its triple-jointed wings. It began to ascend in long slow circles, rising higher and higher, until it was only a white spot moving across the black space of sky and vanishing against the white cliffs.

Our company now proceeded to the villa, where at the garden table Morpheus devoured a bowl of moon-fruit and drank a pitcher of moon-wine. My host put many questions to him, which he answered vigorously and at length, not omitting numerous asides to the woman, who laughed and was far more animated than I had yet seen her. I myself remained silent, not wishing to interrupt their mirth, which I was unable to join, and waiting with some impatience for the chance to speak with Morpheus alone. It seemed to me that my presence had been so thoroughly forgotten that a word from me would have startled them all into silence; and on the very occasion of being reunited with Morpheus I found myself growing sullen and forlorn.

"Why look thee, lad," said Morpheus, filling his glass from a second pitcher, "these Selenite folk did think thee a traveler fro' the far side o' the moon. 'Tis said, creatures o' the far side go garbed in black; yet by gesture didst thou seem to say, thou dwelt beneath the moon."

The Selenites both turned to look at me, as if awaiting a response. Under their expectant gaze I felt shy and awkward, and could find nothing better to say than: "Well, yes . . . yes . . ." Morpheus looked sharply at me, as if in disapproval, and returned to livelier conversation with the bearded Selenite. I reproached myself for being shamefully indrawn, and felt self-anger burn in me; yet I wished he had not turned to me before the Selenites, and drawn attention to my alien nature.

When the meal was done we rode in the pillar to the upper floor, where Morpheus was given a room next to mine. As soon as we were alone I let out my breath and said: "I'm glad that's over."

Morpheus, who had thrown himself onto the bed, removed his pipe and looked at me closely. " 'Tis grave, lad. I much fear me, lest those twain did sore mistreat thee."

"Oh no, no, not mistreat me, exactly: hardly that. But they make me—uneasy."

"Aye. But tell me, lad, did they refuse food to thee, or spurn thee, when thou didst come to them?"

"Nay, Morph. They did invite me in, and in no way failed i' their hostly duties. Yet methought there was a something cold and formal-polite i' their welcoming, like as they welcomed me not in their hearts."

"They did mock at thee, and humiliate thee, feigning welcome?"

"Nay, Morph, wherefore dost not understand me? 'Twas but a want of warmth, mayhap a suspiciousness."

"Thy report doth confound me, lad: for seeing thy coldness and rudeness towards them, methought they had misused thee."

"Coldness and rudeness? Why reproach me with coldness, when I tell you they're the ones who're cold toward me?" Confused and stung by his reproach, I cast about unsatisfactorily for evidence of ill treatment at the hands of the Selenites.

"Now mark well, lad. 'Tis the part of hosts to feed and shelter a stranger cast up at their door, an that stranger menace them not. These Selenite folk did take thee in, and feed and shelter thee, and show thee their dwelling place, and treat thee as an honored guest. Yet in return wert thou reserved and cold towards them. Thou say'st 'tis forwhy they did withhold warmth fro' thee, and treat thee formal-cold. 'Sdeath, I know no law, whereby stranger must o'erflow wi' love towards stranger, or a host show that warmth of affection which he doth not feel. For certes 'tis most to be expected, that these folk should be wanting in love for thee, who are in all ways a stranger. For like unto Ovid at Tomi, thou mayst well say: *Barbarus hic ego sum, qui non intelligor illis*. Which is to say, bright-Englished for thy dusk understanding: Here am I a barbarian, forwhy they understand me not. Thou dost arrive on a sudden, garbed in strange attire, and speaking an outlandish tongue; unable, through ignorance o' their tongue, to say whence thou didst come, and what manner of creature thou art; gentle-seeming, but so untutored i' the ways o' the Selenites as I've no doubt thou didst unwitting many times offend; yet for all thy crude ways they did take thee in, and share their home wi' thee; the lord o' the house so far trusting thee, as to leave thee alone wi' his wife; yet forwhy they could not suppress an uneasiness i' thy presence, thou dost straightway charge 'em wi' coldness, acting towards 'em like as they had driven thee fro' their door. Now tell me, lad: hast done well?"

I was so pierced by the justice of his reproach that I found myself unable to speak; and in the fertile silence my mind multiplied instances of my rudeness, coldness, and ingratitude.

As I fiercely searched my actions for new and more blameworthy evidence against me, I began to feel the stirring of a doubt. For I could not suppress the sharp sense that my hosts, however admirably and irreproachably they had behaved, had somehow disappointed in me a deep craving for welcome. It seemed to me that Morpheus was right, and that my accusation had been wildly awry, but that nevertheless something had been withheld from me. But if Morpheus was right, and if by the very nature of the case a watchful and uneasy welcome was all that I could reasonably expect, then it seemed to me that something must always be withheld from me, here in the realm of Morpheus. Yet wasn't it true that Ekli had broken the curse of strangeness, beckoning to me with her alien love? And had I not refused? And didn't I myself wander watchful and aloof, here in the alluring and alien underrealm?

"For look thee, Morph, though thou hast justly chided me, yet do I feel a want of something, here i' thy rich realm; for 'tis wearying, ever to be watched mistrustfully." And as I spoke a weariness came over me, as if I could never see down to the bottom of my unhappiness.

" 'Tis what cannot be helped; for to voyage is to perpetuate strangeness."

"Maybe I'm growing tired—aye, wander-weary. For though a voyager I be, which is to say, a malcontent, yet is rest sweet, aye, e'en for us restless ones."

"Why, it may be so; for knowing thou art o' the dying race, and fearing thou'lt scarce have time to yawn ere thy little bit o' life is snuffed out, old Morph hath spurred us on our way. But as for me, 'tis all one whether we sit for ten thousand o' thy years a-cleaning our fingernails, or fly t' the far reaches o' the Morphean moon in one o' thy niggardly nights. Then tell me, lad: what wouldst thou?"

"Oh, I don't know, I don't know . . . 'Sdeath, Morph, I know not. Yet having spake, 'tis as if a burden hath lifted. Then speak no more o' the heart o' Carl Hausman, that murmuring malcontent, that melancholy moon-voyager; but answer me this, old bird-back rider: how cam'st thou here, puffing thy pipe on the back of a bird?"

"Why, 'twas but rash imitation: for seeing thee climb upon a rock and soar, I too did scramble onto stone, and find me uplifted. For look thee, lad, these moonbirds do know, how to resemble what thing soe'er they land beside; and some alighting amongst the rocks o' that field, did straightway assume a craggy shape: which shape first deceiving me, yet once warned I did learn to distinguish, which was rock, and which bird. Wherewith I mounted, and knowing how to

guide my bird, did follow thee t' the high hills: where losing sight o' thy ravisher, I did descend in first one valley and then another, asking of them that dwelled there, whether they saw thee pass. And one having seen thee overhead, I did direct my mount to this place."

"Then many Selenites live in the valleys?"

"I know not, if it be many or few; for those that dwell not i' the cities o' the moon, seeking the valleys among the mountains, do hide themselves away, far from all prying eyes; and none can say, how many live unseen i' the shadows o' the valleys o' the moon. For these Selenites loving quiet and solitude, do seek peaceful and unfrequented nooks and crannies, e'en within their white cities; and there be some that live within hollow mountains, or under lakes and pools. Now most do begin life i' the cities, which though they be quiet, wi' many parks and woods, yet there be streets and buildings, and much society; and the prime of life once past, many do yearn for solitude, and seek the valleys, where they build great hidden-away dwelling places. Now all do call themselves Selenites, that walk two-legged on the Morphean moon; yet 'tis a vasty place, wi' diverse tongues and customs; wherefore these folks did first imagine, thou wert fro' the moon's antipodes. Here 'tis said, how the far side's black as night, and all that dwell there black, and robed in black; yet 'tis sheer legend, for I having traveled o'er all the moon, have seen none but moon-white Selenites, though speaking many tongues, and garbed in diverse guises."

"Did you tell them I come from — up there?"

"Nay, lad. I did tell 'em, thou wert o' the ocean realm below, whereof they have some knowledge; for all the upper realm being but legend to the Selenites, they'd ha' grown wrathful at such a tale. Yet for all that, their fables speak of a moon above the sky, where their race began. In lush and fertile valleys o' the upper moon, the first Selenites did live i' their age of gold; but a great catastrophe bringing ruin, which some say was a quaking within the moon, and others a great stone from the sky, then did a small band o' Selenites reach thy realm: where though some did pine away, yet others did thrive, and mingle wi' thy kind, i' the days when giants roamed the earth. 'Tis said the blond, pale women o' thy realm be sprung fro' such couplings. Yet however that may be, some few o' those few Selenites wandering in thy realm, did find the way down to the realm of Morpheus; and there living for a time in dark isles of Ocean, beneath the Morphean moon, they at length did discover such flying isles as thou hast seen, whereby they did ascend. And living i' the shadow o' the valleys o' the moon, they did slow propagate their kind throughout the regions o' the moon, till at the last great cities rose up. 'Tis thus lewd legend doth wantonly explain, wherefore these Selenites do leave their cities, and seek out valleys: for 'tis said their

race began i' the valleys o' the upper moon. Yet though the realms be interwoven by legend, your bookish Selenites do scoff at such tales, which be taught to children."

"But you've said others of my kind have visited the Morphean moon."

"Aye, lad; yet these be so few, and so strong the belief against it, that they be soon forgot, or pass into fable. Wherefore I said not, thou wert o' the realm beneath the upper moon, lest I be unwelcome, as mocker or liar. Lad, sweet Morpheus hath cooked thee breakfast, while thou didst snore i' the belly of a whale; rowed thee to shore; kept watch o'er thee, whiles thou didst snore amidst the Morphean heavens; and flown after thee on the back of a bird. Old Morph's weary."

"Why, rest thee, Morph, rest thee, whiles restless Carl doth wrest him from thy side; resting well content, to leave thee i' the arms o' Morpheus."

"A wag! I' faith, a wag!" He seemed about to say more, but in silence closed his heavy eyes; and gripping my journal gratefully, I stepped softly from the room.

7. Misunderstandings

I began to wake anxiously in a strange room but remembered that Ekli was just outside, half-reclining on her couch. And I felt deeply soothed, for now there was no need to move, no need to open my eyes completely. She would be staring at me with her great teacup-eyes as I entered. Through half-shut lashes I peered at the trembling wall, which seemed to be white, and as the whiteness puzzled me into full awake-ness I sat up suddenly. I heard no sound. Quickly I rose and stepped out into the corridor. In the neighboring room Morpheus still lay sleeping. Fighting down the temptation to wake him, I returned to my room and sat for a time writing in my journal. The whiteness of the room, the silence, the motions of my fingers, my growing restlessness so distracted me that I could scarcely fix my attention on the page. And I was troubled by my sullen and ungracious behavior toward the Selenites, I longed to atone for it. At last I put aside the journal, cleared my throat, and stepped decisively into the corridor.

At the door of the study I paused to listen and seemed to hear faint sounds within. I raised my fist to knock, but it occurred to me that my visit, however well intentioned, might easily be construed as a thoughtless interruption. I therefore coughed lightly, in order to attract attention, but at once felt foolish, and set forth down the corridor in the hope of finding the hollow pillar. I had nearly reached the end of

the hall when I heard a door open, and turning to look I saw the Selenite step from his room and stand gazing at me. He made no sign. It seemed to me that if I continued down the hall I would appear to be offering an insult, whereas if I walked back toward him I might appear to be taking for granted an invitation that had not been made. I therefore awaited a sign, but he continued to stand there as if wondering what I intended to do. It struck me that perhaps my walk down the hall was itself the violation of a rule or custom, and that he might be awaiting an explanation, or controlling a sense of outraged propriety. It seemed inadvisable to speak, since my words would not be understood, and in any case I would be forced to raise my voice nearly to a shout; a wave of the hand seemed inappropriate and frivolous. At the same time my continued silence and paralysis seemed the very image of awkwardness and even rudeness. Longing for motion, and desperately uncertain what to do, suddenly, impulsively, I bowed. It was an action, I felt with intense relief, that permitted me in a single motion to acknowledge his presence, honor his house, and free myself from the torment of an embarrassed immobility.

Yet as I rose from my bow I wondered whether perhaps my gesture bore no more meaning to him than if I had suddenly leaped into the air. His response startled me: he stood motionless for a moment, and then returned to his room. I now felt certain that I had insulted him, and did not know whether I should hurry after him and attempt to make amends, or simply walk away and not make matters worse. But as I stood there indecisively, feeling as barbarous as Ovid at Tomi, he stepped back into the corridor and to my surprise addressed me. Alarmed by the harshness of the sounds, and unable to understand whether I was being commanded, questioned, or scolded, I began to walk uneasily toward him. It occurred to me that perhaps I was being ordered to leave.

Somewhat stiffly he invited me into his study and pulled out a chair, on which I uncomfortably sat. He turned to face me and began to speak, stopping suddenly and stroking his beard as if defeated by my invincible ignorance. At last he stepped over to his desk, picked up a long scroll, and handed it to me. When I unrolled it I saw faint white wavy lines on a white background. I looked up in perplexity and saw him staring intensely at me; at once he averted his eyes. It struck me that I must bewilder him as completely as if I were a merman or a giant. As we continued to sit in uneasy silence, I experienced a restlessness so violent that it felt like an inner tickling along my arms and legs, and suddenly I rolled up the scroll and stood up, saying: "Thank you for taking the trouble to show me this, sir, but I'm afraid I can't make any sense of it. I realize you can't understand my words, which perhaps strike you as barbaric, but I did want to say that I had

no intention of interrupting your studies. I was on my way out, actually. I really have to be going now. Sorry. Bye. Good luck." I handed him the scroll and bowed again. Turning abruptly I fumbled for the door and clumsily left.

I strode down the corridor without looking back, and as I made my escape I had the dismal sensation that I was walking unevenly, as if drunkenly reeling. At the far end I entered a room where I expected to find the pillar, but evidently in my nervous excitement I had passed through the wrong doorway, into a large white sitting room. In one corner I saw a stairway; hurrying over I began to descend. The stairs led down to floor after white floor, and as I descended faster and faster I had the sense that at any moment a shout would sound, an accusing finger point, a grim servant block my way. But all was silent and empty. At the bottom of the stairs I found myself in a great hall with an open doorway; through the door I stepped into the high passageway that led from front to back.

I turned toward the wild, uncultivated portion of the path, pushed my way past the white branches, and entered the rear garden. Perhaps it was my state of nervous excitement, perhaps it was simply the wine I had drunk before sleeping, but a powerful urge came over me, and passing through the wild garden into the tangled white forest I opened my robe and splashed loudly against the base of a tree—shocked to see a dark blackish stain against the white glow. Guiltily I kicked white soil over the discolored ground and thrust white fists at the stained tree. As I stepped from the wood I was startled to see the woman standing in the garden, staring directly at me. But as if to forestall accusation I rushed wildly up to her, throwing my arms about and protesting that I had gotten lost. She stepped back, looking at me with an expression that seemed harsh. I realized that I was speaking loudly. With my hands I described the pillar; she turned silently and led me back. Without looking at each other we rode up to my floor. She led me to the corridor but did not accompany me farther, and as I strode away I felt her watching me from the end of the hall. I passed the study, and then my own room, and with the feeling that I hadn't a moment to spare I flung open the door to Morpheus' room. "Up, Morph!" I cried, "I've ruined everything!"—and wearily, irritably, he opened his heavy-lidded eyes.

Wildly and unhappily I poured out my shameful adventure, returning again and again to my abrupt flight from the study, my doglike urination in the wood, my rush at the startled woman. As I spoke, it seemed to me that only someone who had set out to give offense could possibly have behaved in such a manner, and I wondered whether I had secretly longed to insult the Selenites, who perceived me as a barbarian. Morpheus listened gravely and said

when I was through: " 'Tis no light matter, lad. These be gentlefolk. 'Sdeath. Wait here."

He left abruptly. A few moments later I heard him rap on the scholar's door and enter, while I paced up and down like a man awaiting sentence. I felt hopelessly to blame, and strove desperately to excuse myself, only to discover new probabilities of offense and insult.

The door opened sooner than I had expected and Morpheus entered alone. He shut the door behind him and stood staring at me. After a time he said: "Tell me, lad, art feverish?"

"It's really that bad?"

"Didst sleep poorly, i' thy strange bed?"

"They think I'm a madman?"

" 'Sblood, 'tis I that think thee fever-mad; for going to's bookish chamber, and there finding our host and hostess deep in talk, no sooner do I ope my lips t'excuse thy vile actions and apologize thee into civility, than lo, mine host doth 'gin to sigh, and heap such reproaches on's own white head as it must turn to jet: saying how he did think to have heard thee at's door, yet awaiting in vain thy knock, he did at the last look out: but seeing thee at the end o' the passage, he feared he had been mistaken, thou having but passed by. Wherefore not wishing to disturb thy freedom, or seem to impose on thee an obligation, he did await a sign, that he might know thy desire. And seeing thee bow, which in these parts doth signify leavetaking, he did await thy departure; yet seeing thee stay, he feared lest his presence did constrain thee. Whereat he returned to's chamber, uneasy in mind; but hearing no sound of thy departing footsteps, he doth step out and see thee unmoving there. Sore perplexed, he doth invite thee to's chamber, where seeing thou'rt ill at ease, he doth show thee a map o' the region; yet he much feared him, lest he did stare so ungraciously at thee, as gravely to insult thee; for lo, on a sudden thou didst take thy leave. Thus didst thou plunge him in deep remorse. Scarce hath he begun to reproach himself, when's wife all desolate doth enter, wringing her hands: for seeing thee enter the wood, wi' the bearing of one who would be alone, and sensing thy shy and secret nature, she did await thee i' the garden; yet on thy coming forth she so startled thee, who mayhap didst desire but to wander alone in undisturbed meditation i' the wood, as thou didst seem to reprove her severely. And reproaching herself for her clumsy 'haviour, yet hoping to make amends, she did accompany thee t' this floor, where all coldly thou didst take thy leave of her; whereat she did seek her husband, to advise with him, and reveal her wrongdoing. Thus did I find two disconsolate creatures: who o'er joyed to hear the true history of events, and to learn thou dost reproach 'em not, yet grieved to learn of thy unhappiness in thinking thou hadst in any manner offended, do

mutually invite us to breakfast. Yet caught I the midst of all these tender consciences, I know not whether a god can swallow his food in peace, lest someone, seeing him swallow, should exclaim: Oh oh, 'tis all my fault thou didst swallow, who mayhap didst desire but to chew."

I felt sharply grateful for the kindly and gracious manner in which I had been misunderstood, yet I remained uneasily aware that my relation to the Selenites was one of mutual misunderstanding. At the same time I was troubled by something Morpheus had said.

"Now Morph, I do thank thee, that thou didst set matters straight among us; yet when I hear thee say, thou didst relate the true history of events, then do I grow uneasy, fearing thou didst report my adventure i' the wood."

"Why, that I did, lad; for the lady enquired, wherefore thou didst wander there."

"But to tell her, Morph—to tell her. I feel humiliated. ,,

"Why, thou dost blush, lad. 'Sdeath, these mortals do confound me; for ye do murder one another most cheerfully, yet do blush to piss."

"I blush at offending strangers—at violating custom. Why did you tell her?"

"Why, 'tis a custom well known among the Selenites; but as for thee, I did report that thou didst botanize i' the wood. Was't not well said? Come."

In the corridor he stepped across to the door facing mine. He opened it to reveal a small white room containing a white chest or bench, in the middle of which was a hole. Below the opening I could see many thin streams of water, which continually washed the sides.

" 'Tis the necessarium, lad. These Selenitish folk be skilled i' the pumping and disposition o' water. 'Tis but a great shaft water-laved, that doth run through the house and down to a conduit. There be three such shafts i' the villa, and three close-stools on every floor. Each stool is set to one side of her shaft, and joined thereto by slantwise conduits. There's a fourth shaft as well, which doth provide a lavatorium to each floor. Think on these things, when thou wouldst botanize i' the wood. Ah, visitors."

8. The Waterfall

I turned to see the Selenites standing at the open door. Despite the innocence of the circumstances I felt myself blush with embarrassment and chagrin, for it seemed I was destined to encounter my hosts only

at moments most open to misconstruction. But I was prevented from indulging my mortification by the scholar, who without a trace of awkwardness began a lively conversation with Morpheus on what was clearly the subject of water-closets.

Our company now descended in the water-elevator to the table in the garden, where we were served a large breakfast of cakelike foods, of which I was able to distinguish half a dozen different tastes, and goblets of white liquid, one hot and one cool. After the meal we strolled about the grounds. Morpheus acted as interpreter while our host and hostess energetically answered my questions or launched into technical explanations of drains, fountains, flowerbeds, paths, and the art of landscaping. It was during this stroll that I thought to ask about the two facades, and learned that it was customary among the Selenites in that region to combine in a single dwelling conflicting architectural ideas. What more unreasonable, argued the husband, than to limit oneself to a villa symmetrical or asymmetrical throughout, when both possibilities might be expressed in the opposing facades and rooms of a single dwelling? He for his part had his symmetrical and asymmetrical moods, which was to say, his formal and informal, his grave and playful, his somber and irresponsible moods, and what more eminently satisfactory than to be able to give reign to each by simply walking to the other side of the house? But there were other advantages as well. For when his thoughts became dull, rigid, and geometrical, then he had only to stroll to the other side of the house, where in the crooked stairways and irregular chambers he would experience an inner loosening; and when, as too often happened to those who spent much time in solitary reflection, his thoughts grew confused, disorderly, and tediously wild, then he would stroll to the reined and bridled side of the house, where in time his inner turmoil would feel the benefits of outward balance and harmony.

But here his wife, who had by no means been silent during our walk, pointed out that the visitors from below must not suppose that the back of the villa was in any real or natural sense disordered and wild, for the wildness of which they spoke was an artificial and carefully devised wildness that itself was intended to balance the front of the house. In this sense the entire house and grounds might be thought of as a single work of art, characterized by balance and harmony of parts. This observation interested me so much that I could not help remarking how, among the Atlanteans, I had seen a palace designed so as to be rigidly geometrical on the outside, while on the inside disorder in the disposition of rooms was given deliberate reign. My remark, conveyed through Morpheus, appeared to interest both of them greatly, for they asked many questions about the Atlanteans, and

about my travels in the realm below the moon. When they inquired about the island I had come from, I felt a mixture of awkwardness and sorrow, and urged Morpheus to be evasive in his answer, and to avoid needless elaboration; but as for me, I refused to say any more than that I was a guest of Morpheus, and that I had traveled widely and seen many lands.

I had expressed admiration for the tall fountains in front, and with evident pride and boyish excitement the master of the villa led us through the wood in back to the narrow waterfall, which was no more than three or four feet wide and plunged down the white slope from a source immeasurably high above. At the base of the falls stood a funnel-shaped cistern, whose bottom half was buried in the ground. There below, he explained, a conduit led underneath the wood and garden to the villa—but come, he would show us. And stepping briskly through the wood, he led us down a flight of steps at the side of the villa into an immense dim-glowing dark basement, where great white squarish pipes stretched above our heads. One led beneath the elevator column; the lever under the bench turned the central pole, which opened a valve that released the water to flow upward. The water in the column was stopped by reversing the lever, and lowered by moving the lever into another position, which opened a second valve: the escaping water flowed down into a waste-conduit and was carried away under the ground. Three other pairs of conduits operated the three columns of water-closets; a fourth pair operated the lavatorium shaft; and a long pipe led with many branchings to the high fountains in front. When he inquired after the hydraulic system of my island, expressing special interest in our method of creating artificial lakes and rivers, I glanced uneasily and reproachfully at Morpheus, saying I would have nothing to do with these fabrications, and urging him not to drag me any deeper into misrepresentation than was absolutely necessary for the purposes of civility.

From the basement we climbed a flight of steps to the central passageway and proceeded to the garden-table. Scarcely had we sat down to our moon-wine when the master and his wife, with a few words to Morpheus, rose and walked from the room. I turned to him with a look of surprise.

“ ‘Tis this way, lad: the twain having invited us to dwell wi’ them here i’ the villa, ere we continue on our way, do leave us for a time, that we may unencumbered discuss what we intend to do.”

“Well, as for me,” I said, leaning back contentedly, and at once grew silent. I had been on the verge of accepting the invitation, which presented a longed-for chance to bring my journal up to date, and to gain much-needed rest. But even as I contemplated the advantages of acceptance, an uneasiness came over me. Although my erratic

behavior seemed to have been entirely forgotten, and a new ease established among us, it remained true that Morpheus had lied to them about me, and invented for me an island origin. My relation to the Selenites was therefore based on a deception, concerning which the master had already requested additional details. I would be forced to perpetuate and elaborate this lie, while receiving genuine information in return, or else I would be forced to reveal the truth, thereby exposing myself as a liar or, if Morpheus was correct, inviting such contemptuous incredulity as to throw my entire character into doubt. But quite apart from these considerations, I felt a strain in their presence. Part of it was simply my ignorance of the Selenite tongue, and could be remedied by long study and intercourse. But part was also their slight constraint in my presence, their sense, never fully concealed by civility, of my disturbingly alien nature. My absence of whiteness, my outlandish clothes, my mysterious gestures and habits, all these signs of an essential strangeness continually and helplessly disturbed the tranquil moon-dwellers, who were set apart even from their own society and unaccustomed to voyagers. And their faint, continual inquietude worked upon my own nerves, sharpening my sense of intrusion and foreignness. Morpheus was by no means impervious to such sensations, but seemed instead to enjoy them actively, perhaps as a way of releasing himself from himself. But I was thrown back all the harder upon myself—not fruitfully, but in a manner that seemed to magnify my isolation.

“Why, Morph, though ‘twould be sweet to tarry in these white halls, and rest from wand’ring i’ the dark, yet would I fain continue on my way: for though rest be reason’s behest, yet being mortal born, I’ll find time to rest when time is done, which is to say, i’ the restful grave: wherefore I say unto thee, I’d not tarry, being a voyager.”

Morpheus looked at me closely during this speech, as if divining my unspoken reason, but when I was done he said only: “Is it so, lad? Is it so?”

Suddenly he clapped his hands together, startling me so sharply that I nearly spilled my wine. “Why, then, away! Up, mortal, up: for e’en as thou retest, thou rottest.”

I was not prepared for so sudden a departure, and would have urged a more reasonable scheme if the Selenites had not returned, as though summoned by the clap; and when Morpheus spoke to them I saw looks of gentle disappointment pass across their faces. It occurred to me that I could change my mind—but at the thought a stubbornness came over me, and despite my slight tiredness I rose without regret.

It was the mistress of the villa who conducted me to the upper floor. She waited in the watery pillar while I went to my room, where I collected my journal and smoothed the sheets. As I stepped back into

the corridor I hesitated for a moment, looked to the left and right, and crossed quickly into the little white room directly opposite my door. Gravely I stared at my dark stream as it splashed into the white box and was washed away by many rivulets. The rivulets flowed slantwise into a great vertical shaft, which plunged through every floor of the villa into a waste-conduit in the shadowy basement; and as I stood there I had the sense that I was somehow atoning, as if the jets of water were washing away the stain in the wild wood.

We returned to the ground floor and our party at once set forth. I had no very clear idea of how we might leave the valley, but dimly supposed we would return to the hedge and await the descent of a bird. I was therefore surprised when the master led us through the wood at the back of the villa to the foot of the waterfall. A short distance from the cistern he indicated a narrow crevice in the cliff. The opening widened into a great cave. In the middle of the cave rose a white pillar that vanished into the dark.

We entered the pillar and stepped onto a platform that bore in the center a three-tiered fountain. Water rose gently from the topmost tier, spilled into the middle one, and fell from there into a circular basin in which I saw white fish swimming. We sat on the rim of the basin as we slowly ascended. Morpheus lit up his pipe with a Selenite match and chatted away with the master of the villa, while I, seated between master and mistress on the fountain's rim, stared at my hands resting on my knees.

After a time we stopped and a door opened. We stepped out onto a narrow, railed bridge that spanned a black chasm and stretched from the pillar to a nearby ledge. Over the rail I could see the pillar plunging far below, disappearing in darkness. We stepped onto the ledge and followed the Selenites into a black tunnel. The passage was a roar with the sound of wind, although I could feel only a faint breeze blowing. At the end of the tunnel I saw a dim white glow, and suddenly we came to the outside of the mountain.

We stood on a windy ledge across from towering white cliffs. High above I saw thin twisting peaks, and taller peaks rising up behind. Far below I saw part of a little villa and part of a miniature garden; the steepness of the cliffs and the narrowness of the valley prevented a fuller view. Beside us fell the narrow waterfall, plunging unseen to the valley floor. The master of the villa, his dark eyes flashing, strode to the edge of the cliff and took deep breaths while his carefully combed hair blew wildly about his face. His wind-whipped robe-sleeves gave him the look of some gaunt mountain-bird wildly beating its wings. His wife watched anxiously until, stepping forward, she seemed drawn into the spell of the windswept height. Both stood streaming in the wind at the cliff-edge, as if possessed by the spirit of air. Their

mutual exhilaration in the wild wind of the white mountains, high above their peaceful villa, touched some sympathetic nerve in me, and for the first time I felt a flow of warmth toward the gentle couple. I turned to Morpheus and saw him puffing calmly on his pipe, gazing up toward the cliffs and peaks opposite. He appeared to be looking at a particular ledge, on which I noticed a curious shape. It resembled a tall basket, wider in the middle than at top and bottom. I now noticed several of these basketlike growths, situated on high ledges.

As I watched, I seemed to see a motion far above, and from a basket-shape I saw a white bird rising. I soon made out several white birds settling on other baskets, which I now supposed were nests. We appeared to be several hundred feet below a nesting place of moonbirds, and I had divined our method of escape well before I saw Morpheus pointing with his pipe toward a descending white form. It came down in slow circles and landed on an opposite ledge some twenty feet above. It sat there as if studying our group before it lazily lifted its triple-jointed wings and began to swoop down toward us.

"To him, lad!" cried Morpheus as the bird landed on our ledge and assumed the shape of a jagged boulder. Morpheus climbed onto the rock-bird and helped me mount into a hollow behind him. He waved and shouted at the Selenites, who had turned to watch. I saw the great wings unfold, and clutching the rocky bird-back with my legs and seizing the thick, powerful feathers I felt the ledge fall away. I hadn't the courage, at first, to glance down, and when at last I ventured a look I could not find the Selenites, the ledge, or even the waterfall; and far, far below, as at the bottom of a narrowing well, I saw only a faint glimmer, abruptly shut out by a mountainslope. A moment's dizziness forced me to close my eyes and press my cheek tightly against the feathers. I could feel the bird ascending in wider and wider circles, but when I opened my eyes I was surprised to see us flying in and out among twisting white peaks, over great gorges and abysses of shadowed whiteness.

9. Cities of the Moon

As we passed over the mountains of the moon, a small incident occurred that made me press against my journal all the harder. Morpheus had begun by lying almost flat along the bird, but as we continued he grew less cautious and worked himself gradually to an upright posture, as if he were riding a horse. He turned once or twice to grin at me, and perhaps to make certain I was still there. Seated before me, gripping the bird and holding one hand clapped to his hat, he began looking about, turning this way and that. One of the

shadowy valleys seemed to seize his attention, for he turned and began pointing emphatically below, while shouting something that was lost in the wind. In the excitement of pointing he had forgotten to keep his hand on his hat, which remained tightly pulled over his forehead; but a gust of wind suddenly lifted the derby into the air. I heard his howl; the hat flew back over me; I flung up a hand, but too late; and I saw the hat falling rather gently, tumbling over and over, into the shadows of a deep valley. Morpheus turned the bird harshly and we began to swoop down, but so many twisting peaks thrust up that it was impossible to determine which gorge or gully or downplunging valley the hat had tumbled into. And wheeling upward we continued our flight through the mountains of the moon, while Morpheus shook his fist at the firmament and his dark hair lifted in the wind.

It was not long before we came out of the mountains and began flying high over a white forest. Here and there among great tracts of trees I saw open spaces, shaped at one end like broad rectangles and at the other end gradually losing all definition. In those spaces lay ivory cities. We flew down low over one city, where I was able to make out individual streets and dwellings. All the houses were surrounded by walls reaching higher than the roofs; inner ladders led to the top. I saw that the design of the town was akin to the design of the villa, for on one side of the city the streets had been laid out in rigidly straight lines, but on the other side they wound in and out. The houses in the rectangular part of town were neat squarish ones surrounded by symmetrical walls, whereas on the other side they had wild and fanciful shapes, each with many roofs at different levels, and each enclosed by one or more chaotic walls of multiple heights. Despite my tiredness I felt a moment of regret that I had not chosen to stay among the Selenites, and explore with Morpheus the wavering cities of the moon.

We passed beyond the forest and came to a white plain, where I saw many lakes of all shapes and sizes; and through the transparent white water I saw sunken cities, and Selenites walking about on the lake floor. On the plain itself I saw several upside-down cities. These cities appeared to rest on the tops of their tallest trees, whose roots passed into a thick upper layer of white soil. The hanging houses with their fountains and statues were suspended from that upper earth, and here and there I could see Selenites walking upside down among dangling gardens.

As we flew over this region of the moon we passed above a number of thick white clouds, from several of which I could see housetops sticking up; but the cloud-cities were for the most part so deeply buried in mist that I could form no clear idea of them.

I was searching the horizon for further cities when in the distance I saw what appeared to be a flock of moonbirds flying toward us. As they drew closer I saw that it was not a flock of birds at all, but a flying city. The houses, streets, and gardens did not rest upon a base, but flew along in an undulating and often changing pattern. We passed not far above, so that I was able to see spray from the garden fountains blown back by the wind. The city was not held together in any evident way, and contained many wide spaces through which an inhabitant might fall to the plain below, but I noticed that each flying dwelling stayed fairly close to its yard, its garden, and its orchard. I was at first puzzled to know how the inhabitants moved from place to place, for I saw no bridges, and the undulating, shifting streets and lanes wound in and out without attaching directly to any house or yard, or even to the marketplace that passed beneath us, with its carts and vegetable stands set around a paved square. But as we passed over one yard I noticed a Selenite leaping nimbly from the edge to a nearby garden-island, where he began strolling meditatively among winding paths with his arms behind his back and his robe blowing in the wind.

The plain ended in a range of white hills, which concealed in their translucent depths houses, parks, and streets. Beyond the hills lay the shore of an immense white lake. The air was cool over the water, and several times our bird swooped down and flew close to the rippling surface. We had nearly reached the center of the lake, at a height of some twenty feet, when I noticed a disturbance beneath us, and saw several faint splashes. A moment later I made out a fish leaping from the water and plunging out of sight. As our bird swooped down another fish leaped up, and I saw that it was perhaps ten feet long, thin as an eel, and supplied with two pairs of very small wings. Its jaws were long and furnished with sharp teeth. The fish flew up at us with wide-open jaws that suddenly shut not far from my leg as the bird swerved upward. Violently flapping its little wings, the fish flew after us, but apparently could not rise more than a few feet above the water. Our bird swooped down again, and this time two flying fish rose snapping from the lake and gave chase. Our bird eluded them easily, and now began to skim and rise as fish after fish leaped from the lake, fluttering clumsily after us and snapping their furious jaws. The dangerous sport ended when the moonbird, emboldened by his success, flew carelessly low, and gave a loud gooselike cry as a snapping fish tore from its underside a jawful of thick feathers.

We continued at a safe distance above the lake, and had nearly crossed it when a great mist or cloud rose from the water and enveloped us. The dense cloud proved to be a swarm of minuscule white insects, which made a rasping noise that frightened me. I could feel them against my cheeks and hands like flung sand. The insects

appeared not to bite, but instead clung so thickly to my robe and skin that I was soon covered with a white powder. When I tried to brush off the powder, I discovered to my dismay that it had hardened into a grainy crust impossible to scrape off, although I could move my limbs and fingers and raise my eyelids slightly. We were soon out of the swarm, and I saw that both Morpheus and the moonbird were entirely encrusted. Aside from the intensely unpleasant sense of encrustation, and a fear of harming my eyes, I suffered no serious discomfort from the disturbing white insects, who appeared not to impede our flight.

We passed beyond the lake and came to a rolling white countryside, which I observed distractedly while scraping at the clinging carapace. The rolling landscape grew level, and in the distance I glimpsed what appeared to be a butte or mesa. As we drew closer our bird, which had been flying high, swooped down, and a few moments later came to rest in a meadow. I now saw that the mesa was our island. I was clinging to what seemed a spur of rock; our bird had once again assumed the shape of the jagged boulders lying in the white field.

Morpheus swung a leg over and stepped to the ground.

“ ‘Sbum, thou art the most wretchedest bird e’er turned thyself into a stone, for thanks to thee I have lost my hat, been nipped i’ the heel by a fish, and covered wi’ pestiferous vermin. And to heap Pelion of insult on Ossa of injury, thou hast landed short o’ mine isle, thou bone-bag, thou break-bum, thou bird-bawd and buzz-butt—’sblood, I’ll crack thy brainpan and drink thy brains for breakfast, hah! Art alive, lad? Nay, no lad, but a man o’ snow. Hail, brumal boy—”

“Brumal me no boys, Morph, but say what manner o’ plague is this—for I much fear me, lest I grow all Selenite. Damn. Does it come off?”

“ ‘Tis but vile insecta o’ the lunar lakes, who touching aught do die, and leave their mote-carcases behind, millioning thee wi’ white corpses. ‘Tis but a moment’s work to unhinge ‘em, as old Morph will show thee, upon our isle. But what reck I whether I be insect-fouled or not? For he who was hatted, now doth walk pate-naked i’ the night.”

With this he heaved a melancholy sigh, and seemed so heavy-hearted that I longed to comfort him.

“Why, ‘tis not the end o’ the world, Morph: aye, for hast thou not said, thy world hath no end? Thou having found a hat, sure thou’lt find thee another.”

“Nay, lad: ‘twas that hat in especial did waken hat-love in me. Dost take me for a foul treacherous knave, who would change hats as some do mistresses? Nay, I’ll be true; old Morpheus will be true to’s hat.”

“Well, come on now, cheer up, Morph. I bet you’ll find it again,

next time you pass this way."

" 'Tis scant consolation: for 'tis but a mortal hat, already old. 'Twould be to love a hot ripe wench, lose her, and find her a cold, bald, toothless, blear-eyed, wrinkle-rumped crone, coughing and shaking in her bepissed sheets. Hatless I did set forth, and hatless I return: pity me, all ye who do walk bebrimmed."

We now walked to the island cliffside, glowing with a reflected radiance that seemed a darkish pallor in comparison with the brilliant moon-whiteness my eyes were accustomed to. We climbed onto the rubble of rocks at the sloping base of the island beneath the sheer cliff. The rope-end dangled several feet above my upstretched hand.

"Ah, Morpheus," I said, looking at him wearily and reproachfully.

"Thou wilt climb upon my back: aye, that thou wilt. Thou'lt climb the rope, unfasten it fro' the tree, and fasten it to a nearer tree, that the end may reach into my hands. Thou wilt tie the knot well, lest I break my neck. Nay, do as I say."

Seated on his white shoulders, I was able to reach the rope. Through my stiff white robe I felt my journal, bound by my robe-belt. I pulled myself slowly to my feet, so that for a moment I stood upright on his shoulders, and began to climb. The ascent was not difficult, and I was soon over the top, kneeling in the damp sand of the upward-sloping shore. Showers of sand spilled down the cliff as I pulled myself clumsily to my feet. Still clinging to the rope I made my way up the shore toward the wood, and had just stepped into the trees when I felt a tremor in the ground. The forest floor tipped beneath me, I fell and clung desperately to the rope, Morpheus gave a shout from below; and slowly the island rose from the Morphean moon.

10. A Pair of Slippers

I lay clutching the rope in utter confusion before pulling myself fearfully to my feet. The island appeared to be skimming along the surface of the moon—it seemed I was in no immediate danger of tumbling down the slope and over the edge. Numbly I wondered what to do.

Perhaps it was still possible to drop down to the white meadow, where I could rejoin Morpheus. Even as I wondered I sensed that the island had begun to rise. A sharp breeze blew back the skirts of my heavy, whitened robe. At the fringe of the wood I stood clinging to the rope, peering down the slope of sand at the white and featureless realm stretching away below.

I was about to turn back into the safety of the trees when it struck me that Morpheus might be trapped on the rocky projection at the

base of the cliff. Holding the rope tightly I advanced step by step down the treacherous sandy slope, pressing each foot firmly in place and shouting his name into the wind. Near the edge of the sand, near the edge of the world, I lay down on my stomach and let myself forward in carefully measured stages. Trickle of sand spilled over the edge and blew away in the sharp wind. Against my ribs and stomach I felt my hard journal. Clinging to my rope, straining my neck, narrowing my eyes against the blowing sand, I peered over the cliff.

On the wide spur at the base of the cliff I saw rocks and darkness. Far below, the white world stretched away.

"Morpheus!" I cried, but my words blew away with the sand. At last I rose carefully and returned along the rope to the wood. There I hesitated before deciding to move farther in. With no clear plan in mind I penetrated the forest, climbed the wooded hill, and descended to the valley, where I soon found our old campsite. Here I opened my robe and removed the unharmed journal, which I placed on a flat rock. Despite the strong breeze I removed my heavy white robe and threw it on the ground. The leg-bottoms of my pants were stiff and white. The sight of my white-crusted hands disgusted me, and picking up a sharp stone I scraped at the stubborn rind, but soon flung away the stone in exasperation. The two wooden cups still lay beside the keg. Picking up one of them, I filled it and drank. The charred logs, the cool air, and the tinderbox sitting on a rock led me to think I would start a fire, and I began to collect desiccated leaves to crush for tinder. I arranged my tinder in a little pile on a flat rock and crouched over it with flint and steel, striking sparks that failed to burst into flame. Irritably I shifted position, shook my tired hand, and was about to try again when I noticed something lying on the ground beside the circle of blackened stones.

I put down my implements, rose, and stepped over to the stones. When I bent down I saw an old slipper. Carefully I picked it up and held it in my hands. Filthy, split at the back, and crushed down on one side, it looked as shapeless as an old, unraveling nest. There was a small hole in the toe, fringed with threads. Along the uncrushed side the slipper was covered with a white crust. I stared at it for a long while before looking about suddenly, crying: "Morpheus! Are you here?"

I listened intently but heard no sound. I looked from side to side, and up into the dark air, and over my shoulder. I gripped the slipper tightly, as if it might stroll away, and began walking about uneasily, studying the ground, staring into the night, turning sharply at imagined sounds.

I heard a light thud and whirled around. Under a thick, tall tree not far from where I stood, I saw a second slipper. It lay on its side, as

if asleep. I rushed forward, stopped abruptly, looked quickly about, and peered up into the dark branches. "Hello?" I called, feeling absurd. "Morpheus? Are you there?" I could see nothing.

"What a devil dost thou there below, lad? My skull's cracked, all my ribs broke, my cods spitted on a branch—an thou fetch me not quick fro' this tree methinks I'll limp through all eternity. Nay, I'll turn sparrow and take up a leafy life. Canst see me, lad? Art there below? Ho, lad! Dost have my slippers? Canst climb up to poor Morpheus? What a pox dost thou there? Ho, lad! Ho! 'Zarse, I'm all bruise, all bone-break. Squirrels do bury acorns i' the folds of my belly. A nest in my nose—branches in mine ears—leaves in my throat—a nightingale on my knee—sing hey ho, 'tis the leafy life. Dost see me, leafless lad? Dost come to aid me? Wilt forsake old Morpheus in's time of need?"

I shouted assurance, thrust each slipper into a robe-pocket, and gazed up at the great tree. The lowest branches were over my head, but by jumping I was able to seize a branch and walk myself up the trunk. Once settled on my branch I peered up and managed to make out in the leafy darkness a dim white form high above. I raised myself clumsily to a standing position and began to climb. At the lower trunk the limbs were thick and closely spaced, but as I made my way higher the branches thrust up at sharper angles and my footing grew more treacherous. I was at last able to reach the branches directly beneath Morpheus, so that my head rose over his knees. He was lying on his back among shattered branches with his hands folded on his belly, for all the world as if he were lounging on a couch.

He lifted an arm before his face and cried: "Begone, thou cream-faced fiend! Creep back to thy darksome den, and there amidst toads and shriek-owls show thy mournful visage! Gloom-glider, away!" "I was afraid you were still on the moon."

"What, lad! Is it thee? Thou'rt grown pale of late. Is it love wastes thee thus? Tush, 'tis but to sicken for an itch. Hast grown bookish since last we met? Study will be the death o' thee, midnight lad. Thou must walk more i' the sun. Hast brought my slippers, Carl? Hast brought old Morpheus his slipped slippers? 'Tis a fine lad. 'Tis a most sweet lad, though pale. Canst slip my slippers on my slipp'ry feet? A pretty *traductio*, is't not so? Now be a good lad, and lend a hand, that I might sit up in my nest. Aye—nnn—oof—'sblood—ah. Thus do we dead awaken. Ods cods, what say'st thou, lad? Dost envy my high home?"

"Easy, Morph—that branch is broken. Pray excuse my prying nature, but may I ask how you got up here?"

"Is it the note ironical? Is it the wee voice sarcasmical? Thou art green in mockery yet; thy derision wanteth bite. 'Tis like the seedless belly of an unripe wench: it doth promise more than it doth show. What? Dost know me a god, and wonder that I dwell on high? These

mysteries will I unveil. Learn, mortal, that when thy itching isle did gin to tremble, I looked me all about, yet seeing naught to aid my climbing, did scramble t' the moon as thou didst lift above. There howling thy name, in hopes thou wouldst rush wi' thy rope t' the isle's edge and spring down, yet seeing thee not, I like one gone mad did run after thy wayward isle, raging and cursing, yet all in vain, for 'twas by now twenty feet o'er my head; and thinking o' naught save calamity, and hot wi' wrath, I spying a damn'd boulder in my path did bring my fist down so hard upon it as I near broke my hand — when lo, the rock doth 'gin to lift his wings, and I seeing 'twas another featherhead in that field, did leap upon's back, and fly after thy now climbing isle. Which soon reaching, we did fly o'er the rearward hills, that likewise flying seemed to pursue us: till passing beyond the pond, I did see our charred ruins below: and thinking 'twas as safe a place as any, did direct my flying featherbed downward. Yet mayhap because 'twas a featherbrain, 'a did land atop a tree; and I in sliding off did tumble among the upper branches, which here and there did crack; till coming to rest upon my back, and watching my mount fly off, I did await thy coming. A thirst is on me, lad. We must seek our wine. A pox on the leafy life! My back's cracked — chin hacked — neck wracked — twigs pierce me like arrows — my bum's all branch. Thy hand, lad. Is that twig safe?"

I guided him slowly down from branch to branch, pushing leaves and minor branches out of the way, testing the thickness and firmness of each new support, directing the descent of his slippered feet. On the bottommost branch I stepped away from the trunk and waited for his feet to land securely beside mine. Crouching slowly I sat on the branch and jumped down. When I glanced up, I saw Morpheus still standing there, one arm embracing the trunk and one hand resting on the branch above. I urged him down but he remained motionless, staring down at me like some great white buzzard.

"Nay, lad, 'tis impossible. Is Morpheus a butterfly? Is Morpheus a squirrel? Is Morpheus a death-defying mortal, springing fro' limb to limb wi' no care for the morrow? Nay, he's but a poor undying god, who cracking his scone must suffer eternal headache. Wherefore should I not live i' this tree, a friend to owls and nightingales? Here, nor fox nor wolf shall disturb my lofty slumbers. Here, in my leafy house, I'll dwell in Nature's bosom, far fro' the cold ground."

Slowly, very slowly, he lowered himself to a crouching position. Grunting with the effort, he began to extend one leg — sitting down abruptly with a look of surprise. Still clutching the trunk, he peered down studiously, resting his free elbow on a knee and his chin on his fist.

"Now lad, what's that hard ground, whereon thou dost stand? Is it

stone? No. Is it earth? Yes. What's earth? 'Tis the crumbly portion o' land, which a child can break apart 'twixt his fingers. Hast held earth in thy hand? Aye. Is it hard? Nay. Is it soft? Aye. How soft? 'Tis so soft a weak and boneless worm can crawl within. 'Tis so soft an ant can build a home wi't. And dost thou fear falling on that a worm can crawl through, or ant build with? Nay. 'Twas but a false and unphilosophical fear: for though in appearance 'tis hard, yet in essence 'tis more softer than a featherbed. Thus doth noble reason triumph o'er base passion."

Morpheus gave a sudden, lurching leap, flung out an arm, landed unsteadily on one buckling leg, fell forward heavily onto his hands and knees, and rolled onto his back.

"A plague on philosophy! 'Tis reason hath been my ruin. 'Tis lowly logic hath brought me to my knees and laid me on my back. Then what's the remedy? Drink. Thy hand, lad."

I helped him to his feet and watched him brush bits of grass and dirt from his white hands and knees.

"Methinks there's naught broke, save faith in reason. A toast, lad! A toast! Come! Old Morpheus hath need to revive his fallen spirits."

I folded my arms across my chest and stood firm.

"Now Morph, don't you remember, you told me it was only a moment's work to unhinge these insects. You promised you'd show me how, when we reached our isle. 'Sdeath, mayhap 'tis all one to thee, whether thou be encrusted or no; but as for me, I so detest and abominate this moonsent skin, as I can take no pleasure in no thing, ere I be free of it."

Morpheus stopped before the keg and looked down mournfully.

"Must Morpheus thirst, here by the fountainside? I see by his mad eye, I must; therefore I will; yet sadly, lad; sadly. 'Tis a harsh friend, yet 'a did help thee from thy tree. Then help him from out his skin, an he so desire it. Yet wilt not be chilly, unskinned? A fire, lad. A fire to warm thee at, when thou art a-cold."

With this he walked over to the tinderbox and laboriously set about making a fire. I watched impatiently without offering to help. When flames rose from the circle of stones, Morpheus squatted and held out his hands.

"Come warm thy hands by the fire, lad."

I stepped over unwillingly, crouched down, and held out my hands. Across the fire he looked at me curiously. "Thou hast the look of a pouting Pierrot." "And you the look of a thirsting polar bear."

"Aye, I could swallow a lake. Thou dost 'gin to have the look of a cracked plaster saint."

I felt a tickling in my palms and cheeks; and staring at my hands I saw a network of minute cracks in the white crust.

"Aye, thou powdered popinjay, 'tis heat doth unhinge 'em. Scrape,

dog, scrape."

Itching fiercely, I scraped at my palms; the whiteness flaked off easily. I rubbed my hands violently together, scratched at my cheeks and neck, bent forward and wildly ruffled my hair. A shower of white flakes fell.

"To it, lad! To it! Why, 'tis a miracle: for he whom old age hath snowed wi' white hairs doth like the phoenix rise from's own ashes."

When I looked up, I saw Morpheus slowly peeling a large, unbroken crust of whiteness from the back of his hand.

"For look thee, impetuous lad, it doth slip off with ease, an thou be calm. And now, a toast, a toast! For the gods must be praised, who wrought this wonder."

He rose, stepped over to the keg, and filled the two wooden cups, drinking one off and filling it again. Carefully I peeled the white skin from my watch. The second-hand was sweeping around; the time was 1:39 in the Morphean firmament. Morpheus returned to the fire and handed me a cup. He raised his and looked up at the sky.

"Hail, night! He who was white as virtue doth cast off whiteness disdainfully, and return to darkness evermore."

As I threw back my head to drink, I looked up at the night, where stars shone in blackness. I glanced about; and high over the dark hills I saw a small, brilliant moon.

"Have we come so far?" And again I looked about, as if expecting to see a white peak rising above the shadowy hills.

"Not so far as lover's sighs, women's wantonness, or the hopes of youth: yet farrer than the end o' thy nose."

"I've got to sleep," I muttered with a yawn, lying back and closing my eyes.

X. Envoi:

Hymn to Morpheus



OTHERS have ventured it. Some have imagined it. I have accomplished it. Wonders I saw: the sunken palace, the glittering chambers, gardens of dark desire. And the ebon archways, the ivory cities of the moon . . . Ah, Morpheus! Under dark arches where the ravens sang, I walked in the chambers of the night.

And behold: mine eyes are as balls of fire, my brain is a red spiral, turning. For I have drunk the black wine of the kingdom of Morpheus, I have dipped my hands in the treasure of the dark.

You who worship in the white temples of the sun, you sun-blinded ones who seek wholeness in the heart of the light—what seek you there, in those airy realms, in those blue empyreans? Know you not whence you come?

We who have traveled in the realms of darkness, we who have heard what song the sirens sang and learned what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, fear not the specters of the sun.

It is, then, without hope of gain, without expectation of fame, and with an exhilarating sense of isolation, that I offer to some unknown reader in some unseen room in some unsung corner of some unimaginable city this natural history of the unnatural, this black mappamundi, this obsidian globe, this phantasmic encyclopedia.

O Thou who comfortest the solitary one; Thou friend of the day-disdainer, and of those whom the day disdains; Thou who watchest over the weary one, and all those whom the secret worm torments; soother of kings and criminals; companion of those who seek, and cannot find; thirst, and do not drink; drink, and are not satisfied; father of the exiled, scorner and destroyer, mocker of them that know: grant me the strength of mind and steadfastness of heart to send forth this thy book, O Master of Shadows, Muse of the melancholy wanderer.

Hail, Morpheus, old mocker, old dreamer! I, lone voyager, salute you. In your velvet sleep, in your darksome deep: come, day-destroyer, and fill my sun-dazed mind with blackflaming visions of all-annihilating night. Dazzle me with poppies, darken my day-sight and open the eyes of my soul, that I may go down to the house of

darkness, far from the idols of the sun.

OceanofPDF.com